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LACEMAKER LEKHOLM
HAS AN IDEA

Lacemaker Lekholm
Has an Idea

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BOOK ONE

I

They were approaching Sweden.

Early one afternoon, under a low, chilly December sun, they had seen, a few miles away on the port quarter, the surf breaking house-high against Rockall's desolate sugar-loaf, white with gulls' droppings.

At breakfast on Sunday morning the captain told them that they had passed through the Pentland Firth during the night.

Dinner that evening had been a regular festivity; a display of dress suits, décolletages and jewels from New York and Seattle, Chicago and Worcester, Saint Paul and Minneapolis; champagne and eloquent speeches in praise of the new country and the old, the captain and the ship; the band had played "Du gamla, du fria" and "The Star-spangled Banner," and at dessert a secretary of the Legation in Tokio, on his way home on leave, had declaimed Heidenstam's "Sverige" and drawn tears from many a steely, shrewd emigrant's eye.

Monday had been a breaking-up day. Everyone had packed. And in a corner of the bar, or out on the promenade deck in the raw North Sea December drizzle, those compelled to do so had broken the more or less romantic bonds which people so inclined cannot avoid during ten or twelve days of lazy luxury on that unsteady Cythera, an Atlantic liner.

Early next morning they had headed in towards Gothenburg between bare, rain-lashed rocks, grey and desolate in the faint, drizzly dawn. And they had been met by hundreds of expectant, shining umbrellas on the quay, while, on deck, the band clad in oilskins had played national airs

and eyes had grown wet and hearts had filled with emotion: Sweden, Sweden, Sweden!

At last the Christmas boat, with her thousand passengers and, thanks to the prosperous times, her record mail, which was to spread joy and well-being over a motherland still oppressed by economic troubles, was moored alongside the quay.

A few hours later Dr. Charles Holmes, house surgeon at the American naval hospital at Annapolis, was walking up and down in his room at the hotel among unopened trunks and suitcases. Outside the rain poured down from a low, leaden sky he could not see, but whose height and hue he could guess from the faint light in the room. Across the narrow street on to which his window looked, a row of wet panes stared at him, with impenetrable darkness behind their dirty grey lace curtains. Under one of them a dingy signboard creaked in the wind, and on it was printed in black letters: Anna Bergquist's Dining-rooms.

Dr. Holmes, alias Karl Lekholm, formerly medical student at Lund, walked up and down his room deep in thought.

Now he had reached his goal. Within twenty-four hours he would stand before his aged father and say "Here I am."

He had not seen him for nearly twenty years. About ten o'clock one January morning—it had been a Wednesday, he remembered—he had boarded a Wilson steamer to go out, via London, into the world and life. Once, eight years ago, he had sent home to his father a money order for something over six thousand kronor. That was the sum he owed him. But apart from that money order, dispatched under an assumed name during a visit to New York, he had, all these years, never sent a word to his people at home to let them know how he was doing or where he was.

And now he was at his goal. There could no longer be evasion or delay. Within twenty-four hours he would stand

before his father and say "Here I am." And he was afraid—mortally afraid. All the years that had passed were wiped away like chalk scrawls from the blackboard of his life. He had shrunk again to the boy he had once been, in constant fear of a thrashing, with a daily accumulation of crimes on his permanently bad conscience, living in an equally permanent fear of discovery. But now there was no longer a way out. He must go home, must enter his father's presence and say "Here I am."

Dr. Holmes, alias Kalle Lekholm, paced up and down his room in ever increasing agony of mind. "Why did I never write in all these years?" he asked himself. It was perfectly incomprehensible to him now. It could have been so easy, it *ought* to have been comparatively easy. Only a few lines, a prayer for forgiveness. . . . At any rate it would have been easier than this—having to stand before his father, after nearly twenty years' complete silence, and say "Here I am."

The letter home—the letter which was never written—in which he had meant to explain everything, his crime, his flight, his silence, had been a nightmare to him all these years. Not every night or every day. But the least little reverse in his professional or private life, especially in the last few years, had sufficed to reawaken the old fear in him. "The letter! the letter!"

During these periods of depression the spectre had clutched his throat in an iron grip and squeezed the sweat from the pores in his forehead. He had gone to bed dead tired, as one does after a hard day's work, like a lump of lead in pyjamas. And about three in the morning the stillness all round had suddenly wrenched him out of his heavy slumber, and in the silence, empty and yawning like an abyss, he had felt his whole existence waver, grow giddy and fall. And during the dizzy fall into the bottomless chasm a voice within him had cried, "The letter! the let-

ter!" He had woken at the cry and found himself sitting up straight in his bed, bathed in sweat. And he had promised himself: "I *will* write next Sunday . . . I *must* write next Sunday." . . .

And yet the letter had never been written.

Heaven knew how many Sunday afternoons he had put all recreation aside and endeavoured to pull himself together. But nothing had ever come of it. He did not know how or where to begin. Memories came rushing into his mind, a swarm of accusations, ever growing, howling at him ever louder like an angry mob. Like most other people, he had pleasant memories too of his childhood and youth, in which he played a less pitiable, humiliating rôle, which bore witness to the honesty and modesty in his nature. But it was as though he were in the presence of a hostile, yelling crowd: the pleasant memories, stealing shyly and cautiously into his mind, had no prospect of holding their ground against the shouts of his accusers, demanding his surrender.

He was filled with disgust when he saw his own childhood and youth pass before him. He could not recognize himself, so different had he been then from what he had become since—a good, law-abiding and on the whole successful American citizen. He could not discover any kind of connection between the two individuals. It was as if he had lived two quite separate lives—the one untruthful and unbalanced, the other honest and steady.

His childhood and youth! He had been guilty of most of the sins a boy and a youth can commit; he had lied to escape punishment, pilfered at home to satisfy some sudden and urgent desire. A habit of fibbing as a small boy had grown into systematic deceit at the Gymnasium. And no sooner had he taken his degree than his deceit took an active form. The son of a hard-working municipal treasurer, he had led the comfortable life of the æsthetic university hedonist within the scope a small town allowed: shelves full of beautifully

bound books, frequent visits to Copenhagen, the pose of a gourmet and a judge of wines, his motto the words: "The most difficult thing of all is to do nothing."

It had ended in a crime. And he had run away the same evening . . . to start a new life. . . .

When Dr. Charles Holmes was called down to dinner after a Sunday afternoon like this, devoted to mental concentration and the writing of letters, he had achieved only pages covered with disconnected words. He never got any further. He could not do it. His whole being groaned in anguish under a divine Nemesis which hour by hour, inch by inch, was dragging him before a tribunal from which there is no appeal to a higher court on earth.

So the letter was not written that time.

Instead, since he had married, something else happened regularly in those times of depression; when he felt himself breaking down he fled to his wife, and that he might have something solid to lean on in his life, rootless for all its outward stability, clung desperately to her coldly proud, shallow nature. These approaches on his part astonished her, as she had no idea of what gave rise to them. Dr. Charles Holmes, surgeon in the American Navy, could not confide his life's secret to his wife, daughter of a highly placed American naval officer—the secret that he really and truly belonged to the herd of European criminals who were a national danger from the racial hygienic standpoint. His approaches not only astonished but rather annoyed her. She had never been accustomed to outbursts of feeling of other than a poetical, romantic kind, and they were naturally antipathetic to her.

Sooner or later he recovered from his depression. The recollection of it certainly remained, like the recollection of an illness. But although the memory was always there to remind him that in the depths of his heart he carried an infection which at times of spiritual and bodily weakness

threw his whole organism into a paralysing fever, his outward existence lay before him again, secure and well-ordered—his many duties, his interest in his immediate environment, and his at once exhausting and successful work.

At these times he dismissed all thoughts of the letter. Some day—within a not too remote future—he would get out of harness for a few months and suddenly appear at home. That was the only solution, the simplest reply to the long silence. A look, a shake of the hand, a tone of the voice, could reveal what no letter, however detailed, could explain.

And so the letter was never written. And the journey was postponed, too, year after year. There was always some obstacle—first the hard struggle for existence, then the war, an unexpected appointment to a ship, the fear of being outstripped by rivals during a long spell of leave—there was always something. Once he had actually taken his ticket home. That was after the war, when he was in Paris. But then he had fallen in love with the girl who later became his wife, and so the journey did not come off. He had acquired new interests, a new task which just then seemed to him infinitely more important than cleansing his own system of infections.

And so the years had passed—till a day came when his wife told him that she had fallen in love with another man and wished to be free. Then his fear flamed up into undisguised panic. He *must* go home. No powers in the world could prevent him any longer. He must see his father. His father . . . during the years that had passed he had grown an old man. He had reached the age when even the stoutest tree can be snapped by a storm. The strange thing was that not till now had he seen his father as anything but a middle-aged man, with the sharp, penetrating mathematician's look which hardened into contempt when confronted with the smallest error in the sum of life. His

father . . . he was an old man already, bent and white, whom any trifling ailment might bring to the grave. He was not far short of seventy.

He *must* go home. He must make his way home to the source from which he had sprung, must go back to the only thing that was safe and solid in an insecure, elusive world—his origin. He must see him before he died, must hold his hand in his before it grew cold for ever, must feel it close round his own in the warmth of forgiveness. Everything else must take its chance—marriage, prospects, promotion, everything. . . . But the meeting with the man who had given him life could not be postponed.

He lay sleepless of nights, his hair sticking to his perspiring forehead. It was perfectly incomprehensible to him that he had been able to wait so long—utterly beyond his understanding. He must go home before it was too late—if it was not too late already. He had never thought of that either, he who had been at grips with life and death all these years—that his own father might be dead already, perhaps without having sent him a thought of forgiveness. Perhaps he had lived for years with his dead father's curse resting upon him, and perhaps it was that curse which sent an ice-cold fear through him at night—a message from the dead. This was sheer primitive terror. In those hours, when he lay sleepless, shut in by the crushing, fevering night, with a motor-horn now and again cleaving the silence like the shriek of a hunted, tortured soul, he felt his whole life weighed down by this supernatural curse, through which the dead took vengeance on the living.

He *must* go home. . . .

He inquired anonymously of the vicar of his native town, through the Swedish Consulate-General in New York, whether his father was still alive. When he received an answer in the affirmative, he applied for three months' leave and left his new country the day before his wife was

to marry again. He must go home. He felt he was engaged in a race with death. Every day on board the ship crept by at a snail's pace. . . .

And now he was at his goal. In a few hours he would stand before his father and say "Here I am, father!"

He paced up and down his room in the hotel. His brain was filled with a swarm of memories, thoughts, feelings, questions, which it would take a whole book to describe. For they contained all his own history—the history of his parents, his brothers and sisters, his family.

And it is these thoughts and feelings, and the manner in which his questions were answered by the event, that are the subject of this book.

II

It cannot be denied that Dr. Charles Holmes's continual brooding over his past life had made him what is commonly called a philosopher.

It had happened without himself noticing it. By degrees, as one incident of his childhood and youth after another rose before his eyes, incidents in which he himself had invariably figured as the black sheep and whipping-boy, he had ceased to occupy the centre of the stage and other actors had assumed it—his parents, his brothers, his grandparents, his whole race. His outlook had extended. There was hardly one fit of depression from which he had recovered without having disinterred new memories, new situations, that had thrown a stronger light on his fellow-actors. His own destiny had acquired a background in that of his family, arranged with fuller cohesion, more perfect continuity. And so, in the course of years, the artless tones from these insignificant instruments, unknown to himself, had combined to

form a whole in which isolated events and individual fates seemed to him to melt more and more into a complete melody of life.

Besides his own youthful peccadilloes, there was—and of this too he was unconscious—another cause which, as the years passed, attracted him more and more irresistibly to his family and the varied destinies of its members. It was the impulse which Kant calls the hidden art within us, without which we should have no consciousness, but of which we ourselves are seldom conscious—the impulse to weave together into a connected, coherent whole the fragments of knowledge and experience life gives us.

And in the new world to which he had fled to begin a new life he had met with only fragments. He could expect nothing else—a foreigner and a doctor, continually moving, ordered now here, now there. Of the lives and antecedents of the people who had been his associates at various stages of his career he knew little more than he was able to learn of the surgical cases that came under his care. In the one case it was a fragment of a human soul, in the other a human body. Beyond the few facts revealed by a chance communicativeness in the gunroom, or an accident which required the presence of the ambulance, he had only guesswork to rely on. He had not become really intimate even with his wife's family. It was only when thinking of his own relations that he felt himself able to follow the threads in the woof of life. Only in their destinies, to whose analysis his crime and his loneliness had driven him, could he find the unity his impulse demanded that he should seek.

And so it had happened that one night, while he lay awake staring out into the darkness and silence, and his father and mother, and all the others whose blood was his blood, passed before his inward vision, he asked himself: If this handful of people were the only human beings from whose fates you had the opportunity of passing judgment

on existence, what would be your judgment of life? Could you, on the basis of these obscure lives, arrive at any definite conclusions?

The questions about life, its value, its significance, its purpose, which had forced themselves upon him during his later schooldays and his first years as a student, as upon most young men and women of his generation, rose before him again in the form of these lives with which his own was most intimately connected, and which he was now, in his hours of solitude, piecing together with the aid of all he had heard and seen of them in his childhood and youth.

Life? What was life? What had his family to teach him about life?

III

Of his grandfather, the lacemaker Pehr Anders Lekholm, Dr. Charles Holmes, alias Karl Lekholm, had only two or three definite recollections. One extended over many years; it covered, indeed, the whole period from the time when he began to find his way about in life to the time when he turned his back on his country for ever. The other memories embraced hardly more than a few brief minutes. Swift, painful, dramatic situations, in which a white-haired old man suddenly revealed the weakness, desire for domination, strength and pose of a long life.

The one memory, that which embraced the whole of Karl Lekholm's childhood and youth, was the image of a pleasant, slightly ridiculous little old man with a bushy white moustache and bushy white hair which, even in his old age, fell in a stubborn curl on to the chalk-white, blue-veined forehead, a pair of eyes whose iris was of such a pale blue that it made the impression of being watered, a long,

hooked nose and a curiously sewn collar which he himself had designed to leave free an exaggeratedly large Adam's apple.

On weekdays the old man, whom his grandchildren had nicknamed 'Ensign Stål,'¹ used to wear a brown dressing-gown and sit as often as he could in an armchair at the parlour window, where there was one of the small looking-glasses known as "gossip mirrors." With the aid of this mirror he had an extensive view of all that happened in the street. All the time he sat there he twined his thumbs ceaselessly round one another, and continuous up-and-down movements of the large Adam's apple indicated the rhythm of his thoughts and feelings. On Sundays he displayed more energy. He went to church twice wearing a tail coat, black trousers, creaking high boots partly covered by his trousers, a black cravat and a top-hat.

He did not enjoy the least respect either in Karl Lekholm's eyes or in those of Karl's brothers and cousins. It was as though the old man's grandchildren had been born with the idea that no attention whatever need be paid to him. How this view had become so early and so deeply rooted in their minds that it had become a positive axiom it is not easy to say. Perhaps they had gathered it from the tone of voice in which he was discussed in the family.

The very nickname by which his grandchildren knew him conveyed a world of mistrust and ridicule. For to Karl Lekholm and his brothers and cousins the name Ensign Stål signified the limit of unreliability and untruthfulness. Not till they went to school did they realize, with great difficulty, that the man whose name they had given their grandfather was no Münchhausen, but a generally respected and esteemed historical character. How and when the name Ensign Stål had been given to the old man the Lekholm children did not know. Presumably one of his

¹ After the famous hero of Rönneberg's poem.

own sons, in a moment of thoughtless geniality, had pointed out the supposed likeness between the two.

The fact was that the old man used often to narrate the most hair-raising stories from a war he called the Slesvig war, and about a place called Kolding, where he had been in a fight. And in this fight, as in the so-called Slesvig war in general, thousands of men, according to Ensign Stål's account, had lost their lives. When the lacemaker narrated these stories to any of his grandchildren, he used to make sure that the door leading into the kitchen or the breakfast-room, where his wife most often was, was shut. For whenever old Fru Lekholm, by an unlucky chance, overheard any detail of his stories, she thrust her sharp little bird's face with its long, lean throat in at the door and said:

"There you are, Lekholm, talking so loud that the walls shake. You're too old to sit and tell innocent children such lies."

Then the lacemaker brushed up his white moustaches and thumped the table with his fist.

"Be quiet," he roared. "Deuce take it! Am I lying? Wasn't I in the fight at Kolding, eh?"

Old Fru Lekholm gave him a long, sharp, piercing look. But that was the only answer she had to give. The lacemaker *had* been in the fight at Kolding.

The view that Ensign Stål was a ridiculous figure was, therefore, easily explained. As to his kind-heartedness, Karl Lekholm had come to this conclusion because the old man used to give him five öre every Sunday when he accompanied him to church. He could still, a middle-aged man, feel the old fellow's dry, shrivelled hand, with the great blue veins he was afraid to touch, close round his own as they walked to the church. When this first took place Karl could hardly have been more than four or five. He received the five öre when they parted after the service, a short way from his grandparents' door.

Then the old man stopped in the street. "Hold my stick," he said, and looked carefully round.

The stick was a Spanish cane with a curved ivory handle, a dog's head yellowed with age and with dirt in its ears.

Then he took out his black purse, fished out the coin, looked round him again and put it cautiously into Karl's hand.

"There you are, but remember—not a word!"

Karl promised. He took his cap off without saying thank you—well, he had promised not to say a word about the five öre—and ran straight to Söderberg's, the confectioner's shop in Östra Storgatan, which opened at one o'clock on Sundays. There he bought five-öre's worth of "remains"—biscuits which had crumbled during their tenancy of the glass jars on the shelf behind the cake counter.

On weekdays, at any rate during his earliest childhood, Karl saw very little of Fnsign Stål. And their relationship was, without any kind of agreement, as cool as is always the case with two people who are allied in some rather discreditable secret adventure.

But one Sunday their joint church-going came to a fearful end. It was a wet day, and the rain was pouring down. The old man was in a hurry to get home, and in his haste he had entirely forgotten the mite he owed his grandson. They had entered Karl's grandparents' front gate without the old man once moving his hand in the direction of his trousers pocket, where he kept his purse. And now, when, to judge by all indications, it seemed to be his intention to cross the yard diagonally and go into his house by the kitchen door, Karl Lekholm considered that it was, to say the least, high time to remind him of the tribute. He was convinced that, bound by his promise of silence, he would not dare to remind his grandfather of the little *douceur* once he was in the house. He gave a tug at his grandfather's hand and said:

"Grandpapa, you won't forget the five öre, will you?"

"Deuce take it!" the old man said. He led him back to the gate, put down his open umbrella, put his hand into his trousers pocket, and was about to hand over the five-öre piece to Karl when—the kitchen window was suddenly opened. Grandmamma, who had been standing, hidden by the blind, whipping cream for the Sunday pudding, and while doing so had observed their curious proceedings, thrust her lean head, with a white lace cap on it, out of the window and shrieked:

"Lekholm, what in Heaven's name are you about? Do you think I don't see what you're doing? Do you think we're millionaires?"

The old man stood, purse in hand. He looked first at her and then at his grandson. Then he submissively thrust his purse back into his trousers pocket, picked up his open umbrella and went grumbling across the yard into the kitchen. By that time Karl was already a good part of the way home. The moment he heard his grandmother's voice he had grasped the seriousness of the situation and burst headlong out of the gate into the street.

With this scene their church-going automatically came to an end. Not a word more was ever said about it. Grandfather and grandson instinctively avoided one another for a long time after. Karl Lekholm could not look his grandfather full in the face; he was ashamed for the old man's sake.

Another of these sudden situations which had burned itself ineradically into Dr. Holmes's memory took place a few years later—one of those intense incidents in which a whole long human life stands out transfigured, cleansed from the stage of sordid cares and the grey dust of the daily round.

It was a day at the beginning of October. His Majesty King Oscar II, with his two sons Gustav and Karl, was to pay a visit to the town to open the new town hall. The sta-

tion buildings were adorned with the king's monogram surmounted by a crown and hung with wreaths. Avenues of flags had been put up along the main streets and round the market-place. Flags were flying from the military headquarters, the governor's house, the schools, the leading hotel and a number of private houses and offices. On the platform were waiting the governor of the province, the president of the court of justice, the general, the regimental commander, the mayor and many others. Outside a battery was drawn up with limbered guns, farther off the children of various schools formed a double rank, and beyond them, in the direction of the market-place, the citizens were crowded on both sides of the royal route.

It was a brilliant autumn day, real king's weather, with sunshine, a touch of cold and just enough wind to catch the flags and blow out their yellow crosses to greet the exalted visitors.

Karl Lekholm, who was then in the fifth form of the elementary school, was standing drawn up along with his comrades when he suddenly received a violent nudge.

"Look, Kalle, look, here comes your grandfather! What on earth's that uniform he's got on? And what a lot of medals he's got on his chest! He's regularly *dressed up*!"

Karl Lekholm looked . . . and a second later he went scarlet in the face for shame, his knees grew weak under him, and he felt himself shrinking like a toy balloon. For there he came, his old grandfather, Ensign Stål. He was wearing his uniform from the Slesvig war—the one which hung in a glass case in the parlour; he had four medals on his chest, white gloves on his hands, and the huge silvery moustaches stuck out waxed and stiff on each side of the thin, withered face. He walked between the straight lines of citizens, school-children and soldiers, as if he were one of the most eminent dignitaries in the town, received with titters and followed by laughter.

The apparition was at once so unexpected and so strange that no one attempted to stop him, not even the town magistrate or the chief of police. Rigid as a poker he strode towards the entrance to the station, over which was the king's monogram.

And there he remained "standing at ease," with his arms hanging loosely at his side and the right foot a half pace in front of the left, in correct military style.

Two or three minutes later the king and his two sons appeared at the door leading from the platform. The regimental band struck up a march, the battery commander gave the order to shoulder arms and himself saluted, the guns on the old ramparts thundered out the first of their twenty-one shots. . . .

The king stopped. He caught sight of lacemaker Lekholm, who was saluting him at the foot of the steps, standing stiffly at attention with his right hand correctly raised to the peak of his cap. The king stopped again and went up to the eccentric figure. Karl Lekholm shut his eyes in terror of what was going to happen, of the king's wrath which was about to fall on his ridiculous old grandfather, and not till it was all over did he dare to look up and hear what had happened. . . .

There was a third memory too. He was fourteen or fifteen years old then. It was a winter's evening, just about New Year's Day, and he was in his father's room. The lamp with its green shade was burning on the writing-table. The stove had been lighted, and now the register was shut and Karl's father was standing before the stove with his hands behind him. Grandpapa and Uncle Fredrik, who had come back from America that Christmas, were sitting on the sofa. At Christmas nothing but gloomy topics had been discussed—Anders, who had died a few months before, money, embezzlement, drunkenness, ruin. . . .

Suddenly Uncle Fredrik said slowly, emphasizing each word:

"If I had known that, I could have helped him!"

There was a dead silence, a long, oppressive, painful silence.

Then, suddenly—no one really knew how it had happened, so absorbed was each one of them in reflection over Uncle Fredrik's words—suddenly the old lacemaker had rushed at Karl's father. He had seized him by the collar with both hands and shaken him backwards and forwards:

"You're fractricides, that's what you are! You're fractricides, you and Per!"

Karl Lekholm's father, who had inherited his mother's height and was a head taller than his old father, stood quite still and let himself be shaken. He only said:

"Go out of the room, boys!"

And Karl and his three brothers slouched out of the room in silence, one behind the other.

IV

At the time when Dr. Charles Holmes made his noisy entrance into the world, at the beginning of the eighties, the old lacemaker had been for more than a decade a superfluous individual, broken, dethroned, without authority; an empty noise of which no one was afraid. Even the profession to which he had devoted the strength of his youth and manhood was such that it now hardly afforded a living, at least in the form or on the scale on which he exercised it. And it was not only he himself and his occupation which were hopelessly of the past; the whole epoch in which he had been born and brought up, had lived and worked,

seemed now, in his old age, so infinitely remote that it had long melted into pure legend bordering on the idyllic—a time with no telegraphs, railways or telephones.

That time had been *his* time. And in it he had been a devil of a fellow.

One only needed to ask him to find out that. And that he had been in the prime of life, if not exactly a notable figure, nevertheless a figure in the daily life of his native town and his circle of acquaintances—the countless stories that were told of him bore witness to that. Stories which with the passage of years, now that the dust lay thick over reverses, cares and troubles, bestowed on him almost classical proportions.

Pehr Anders Lekholm was, as has been said, a lacemaker by trade. He was the fourth of the line, for father and son had plied their craft in the town. It was in its way an aristocratic craft, inasmuch as in his time there were not more than twenty-four lacemakers in the whole kingdom. It was a clean, decent trade, too; not dirty and evil-smelling like a shoemaker's or tanner's, or noisy like a coppersmith's, or sedentary like a tailor's, a watchmaker's, a goldsmith's, or exposed to changes of climate like a mason's, or sticky like a painter's. There was a certain amount of variety about it; sometimes one was spinning up in the long attic, at other times sitting at one's loom in the workshop. It was, in other words, a trade which ought to have suited the brisk, lively little man as a glove fits a hand.

It was, moreover, a trade which in those days yielded a decent living, and not least in his native town. For it was no ordinary town in which he and his father had been born. If the legend that the town owed its origin to a mighty king's dream was not true, it was none the less a town of distinguished origin. It had been built by royal command, as a fortress and bulwark against Swedish attacks and raids on the rich Danish province Skåne, on a low-lying island, sur-

rounded by a river which every spring flooded the fields around and gave the whole district the appearance of a lake.

It was not a pretty town and never had been pretty. It was built on a stiff military rectangular plan, with four straight streets running lengthways, two fairly broad and two narrow, with side streets of equal number and equal straightness crossing the long streets. The whole was surrounded by a high fortress wall with redoubts, bastions, canals, casemates and gates several feet thick with monograms over them.

Two neighbouring towns of great antiquity had been deprived of their privileges as market and craft towns in order to supply it with citizens. No pigs might be kept in the town; no cattle might graze on its ramparts, and every citizen who built a house there must construct a stable for at least eight horses to satisfy the State's billeting requirements. The place had been a fortress and remained a military town, even after most of the walls had been pulled down and had made way for broad, shady boulevards.

A town whose inhabitants were proud of it, where aristocratic officers rattled their sabres in the uneven streets, a town to which charming young ladies of the highest social position drove from the big estates throughout half the province to dance at the great gatherings with gold-braided lieutenants with horse-tails on their helmets and clinking spurs. The world's greatest artillery regiment, Cardell's Regiment, which had won fame in the battles of Grossbeeren and Dennewitz, was stationed in the town. Such was the glory and distinction of being an officer in this regiment, that even in ceremonial processions its junior lieutenant walked several paces in advance of the president of the royal court of justice.

Pehr Anders Lekholm had been apprenticed to his father. As a journeyman, according to the custom of the day,

he had travelled widely; he had worked in Stockholm, Malmö, Lübeck and Copenhagen. He had then seen a good deal of life and men before he took over his father's workshop as a master lacemaker and became a citizen of the town.

In those days he had been regarded in his circle as a remarkably good match. Several years after he had come into the world King Karl XIV Johan had graciously decided that the regiment stationed in the town, as a mark of distinction for the services it had rendered in fighting the great Bonaparte in the battle of the three Emperors at Leipzig, should receive a new uniform, a black jacket the breast of which was adorned with no fewer than eleven rows of black braid.

All this braid-making work was carried out by Pehr Anders Lekholm's father, who had previously woven all the braid which was worn as stripes on the trousers and distinguishing marks on the sleeve. Neither Pehr Lekholm nor his father, therefore, was dependent on casual orders for his earnings, like most of the other lacemakers in the kingdom—lace and fringes for drawing-room sofas, plush chairs and coffins. All that had to be done was to go up to the regimental office once a year, bow to the quartermaster and submit a sealed envelope containing a tender, neatly written out by the copyist at the court of justice, for the delivery of lace and braid for uniforms to his Majesty the King and his Government. It was, strictly speaking, a matter of form. Pehr Anders Lekholm, like his father, grandfather and great-grandfather, was the only lacemaker in the town. His existence, therefore, was deeply and firmly rooted both in the past and in the present. The contract with his Majesty the King and his Government must have been a lucrative business. Only ten years after the Lekholm workshop had obtained the contract, Pehr Anders's father had exchanged his old house for a new one built of stone, in Östra Storgatan, only a hundred yards from the market-place.

V

According to the oral traditions preserved by Pehr Lekholm's sons from his years of apprenticeship and wanderings as a journeyman, nothing peculiar or notable had been observed in regard either to his personal characteristics or his participation in public affairs, until after several years' work abroad he returned to his native town one day at the end of September 1849 with the claim to be treated and admired as a hero. He had been one of the 170 Swedes who had taken part as volunteers in the first Slesvig war. To confirm his statements and claims he brought with him a shabby Danish soldier's uniform of dark-green cloth with red collar and white buttons, and a certificate which Dr. Holmes as a child had spelt his way through such countless times that he still remembered it by heart:

"The Swedish volunteer, PEHR ANDERS LEKHOLM, private in the 5th battalion of the line, 1st company, is hereby released from service with the battalion according to the order of August 9.

"It is the battalion commander's pleasant duty in this connection to observe that the above-named private, during the time he served in the Danish Army, has distinguished himself both by courage and endurance in the dangers and hardships of the campaign and by exemplary good conduct both on and off duty.

"HELGESEN, Major, acting commander

"5th battalion of the line.

"KJAERGAARD, *August 19, 1849.*"

Along with this uniform and this official certificate Pehr Lekholm brought a cutting from a Danish newspaper describing the battle of Kolding. This cutting described how the battalion which had been ordered to take the lead in storming the town had recoiled for a moment before the rain of

bullets with which the Germans received them from roofs, windows and street corners. At this critical moment, however, one of the senior officers of the regiment, Major Schindel, dashed forward into the thick of the fight, and with him Captain Rothe, Lieutenant Goerfeldt, Corporal Larsen, Privates Lars Larsen and Hans Nielsen-Vade, and the Swedish volunteers Berglund, Pousette and Lekholm—names as ineradicably rooted in Dr. Holmes's memory as the order of the Swedish kings. Schindel himself fell, his breast pierced by German bullets, and several of the rest were wounded. But their courage electrified the whole assaulting column, which now rushed forward to victory shouting "Hurrah!"

To these trophies, the uniform, the certificate and the newspaper cutting, Pehr Lekholm was able next year to add others: the Dannebrog Order in silver, an address of thanks, prettily ornamented and framed in cardboard, signed by nearly 50,000 men from every part of Denmark; a silver medal one side of which depicted Heimdal blowing a battle-call on his horn, while the reverse was adorned with a Viking ship bearing two warriors, and inscribed: "And the wind blows her in to Denmark." The medal was accompanied by a letter in which Denmark thanked Pehr Lekholm not only for his personal help, but also for the contribution he had made for "the first cohesion of the Scandinavian peoples in the hour of danger."

All these trophies in turn were installed in the parlour in the Lekholms' house in Östra Storgatan. The uniform and a rifle (which he had not used in the war) and the cardboard address in which he "was hailed by nearly 50,000 men from every district of Denmark" were placed in a walnut bookcase with a glass front, whose shelves had hitherto been adorned with specimens of his skill in his craft. Around this bookcase, which stood against the wall opposite the door leading into the lobby, were grouped his certificate of

demobilization, the newspaper cutting and the address thanking him for his contribution to Scandinavian cohesion in the hour of danger, all three glazed and framed, while the silver medal was mounted on a sort of round cushion of red velvet, which also—but only on ceremonial occasions—was hung up on the wall beside the bookcase. The Dannebrog cross, on ceremonial occasions, Pehr Lekholm himself wore on the lapel of his tail coat.

There was, then, no question but that the little lacemaker was a hero. He had been working in Copenhagen when the war broke out. That he had served in the war as a volunteer was also known in the town from the letters he had written to his father—his mother was dead—and which he had signed: "My father's ever-faithful son and soldier, P. Lekholm, 1st company, 5th battalion of the line."

That he would return as a hero was, apparently, something which those who had known him in his childhood found it harder to imagine. His outward appearance, to begin with, corresponded in no way with the popular conception of the military heroes of history, least of all in a garrison town, and at a time when no one much under six feet tall was accepted as a recruit for an artillery regiment.

Pehr Lekholm was considerably below medium height, so undersized, in fact, that his marvellous good fortune in coming out of the fight at Kolding with a whole skin was jestingly explained by his being so small that the Germans could not see him. The warlike moustaches with which he reappeared in his native town, and which he allowed to grow in such a way that they joined his whiskers under his cheekbones, were calculated, if anything, to emphasize his amiable, not to say rather foolish, expression.

And as for his qualities of character, there was not one acquaintance of his childhood or youth who preserved from those days any memory of him which could be said to indicate latent heroism. The courage, coolness and contempt

of death with which he and a handful of other men had inspired a whole attacking column to dash forward to victory seemed, to say the least, improbable, when seen against the background of the obscurity in which he had hitherto lived.

On the other hand, there is no reason to suppose that doubts were cast upon either the documents he brought with him or the vivid descriptions with which he further illustrated and described them. People seem to have accepted his heroic deeds with the reluctance with which Swedes, from time immemorial, have received the news of a countryman's success and exploits in a foreign land. The colonel of the regiment shook hands with him in the middle of the market-place, when they met one day by chance just outside headquarters. His health was drunk at the usual monthly evening of the craftsmen's association immediately after his return from mortal danger. But these honours must have been done him with the subconscious but none the less firmly rooted conviction that in spite of all his heroic deeds he was still only Pehr Lekholm, and Pehr Lekholm, as his fellow-men had learned to know him, was certainly no hero.

This subconscious conviction seems to have shown itself even in the honours that were done him. When the colonel, outside headquarters, congratulated him on the laurels he had won in the field, it is said that he did so with the professional hero's faint ironical smile at the blind hen which, by a quaint freak of chance, had fluttered down into a corn-bin. At the craft association's evenings the same undercurrent of ridicule ran like a broad red strand through all the stilted formal oratory. It all came to this—that anyhow he was the same old Pehr Lekholm as before—and they expressed their pleasure at having him back again as he always had been—a quiet, capable journeyman lacemaker, who was now to take over his invalid father's workshop.

The fact—unfortunately inseparable from human nature—must also be taken into consideration that nobody, even in a small town in the middle of the last century, could or wanted to occupy his imagination for any length of time with anyone so uninteresting as a lacemaker, even if he had inspired a whole assaulting column to dash on to victory.

It is certain that the undercurrent of ridicule and swift oblivion offended the little lacemaker. He and his comrades had been accustomed to different treatment on the other side of the Sound. The whole of the latest period of his life had been filled with enthusiastic ovations and the epic atmosphere of perils overcome. In the field he had often dreamed of his return home, picturing it in the vivid colours of a war painting, as the culminating point of his experiences during the last year. And his reception had been lukewarm, grudging; his exploits had been minimized, ridiculed and swiftly forgotten.

Pehr Lekholm was by nature what we nowadays should call a bad psychologist. His simplicity forbade him to seek for any deep-rooted causes for the reception he had met with. At the same time, his kind, not to say generous, heart prevented him from thinking ill of his fellow-creatures. He was, unfortunately for his own future, ignorant of the Swede's characteristic reluctance to recognize obvious merit openly and without reserve, of the need to level all eminences so typical of his countrymen.

His *naïveté*, moreover, blinded him to the fact that his readiness to make the supreme sacrifice awakened a feeling of shame in many others. *He* had accomplished what *they* had neither desired nor dared. The whole of his little person, made ridiculous by his absurd moustaches, was an accusation which stabbed them to the heart. The sight of this little man, who had come out of mortal danger with a whole skin, reawakened in a painful manner all the doubts and questionings which a year and a half ago, when their breth-

ren's call for help was echoed in the Swedish papers, had kept the keenest of them at home. Evidently the risk had not been so great . . . perhaps they would themselves have returned as heroes, if they had gone forth like men. The doubts of the spring of '48 now turned to accusations of cowardice. And an accusation is something which one does everything possible to get rid of or at least minimize.

But Pehr Lekholm saw nothing of all this. He was conscious only of the lukewarmness, the grudgingness, the ridicule. And he could not explain them in any way except as evidence of mistrust. People thought he lied, or at least exaggerated. And accordingly he felt injured. The misjudgment which he considered was being passed on him grew in his mind—as misjudgment so often does—to an obsession. It was in his particular case very easy for his grievance to take the proportions of an obsession; for it naturally, through a kind of *horror vacui*, filled the gap the changing scenes and stirring events of his year in the field had left behind them.

For a man in the position which lacemaker Lekholm considered himself to occupy the most natural way out would perhaps have been to cloak his injured pride with a chilly, dignified reserve. But this way out was closed to him by another very prominent characteristic in his moral equipment—his gregariousness. He was by nature no more of a recluse than he was a misanthrope. Like the time in which he lived, he was filled with sugary ideals of brotherhood. Moreover, the driving force of his active, lively temperament was a petty inquisitiveness, always stretching out its neck to glean something new, always with one eye on the "reflecting mirror." He must be there in a corner, must feel himself, if not at the centre of events, at least somewhere on their outskirts. And so it came about that Pehr Lekholm, instead of proudly drawing back into a dignified reserve, made it his first duty to define his place in and contribu-

tion to the Slesvig war, and thus dissipate the mistrust with which, rightly or wrongly, he believed himself to be regarded.

The result he achieved unfortunately proved to be quite different from and contrary to his intentions; he only laid bare, more and more pitilessly, the inmost recesses of his nature.

In other words, the hero of Kolding invited ridicule. He became a ludicrous figure, a butt.

It is easy to understand how the transformation from hero to butt could take place so rapidly.

It only required that some member of the company should ask him: "By the way, Lekholm, what was it happened that time you, etc.," for the lacemaker to begin his narrative.

In a few minutes a wag would interrupt him: "Last time you told it all quite differently."

Then the lacemaker would jump up, red in the face as a cock's comb, brush up his bushy moustaches and cry:

"Deuce take it, don't you believe me? Do you think I'm lying? Deuce take it, I never heard such a thing"—and his story used to begin all over again.

The most painful feature of the part he came to play, for his relations, was that when he gradually realized it he only made a still greater fool of himself by his fruitless efforts to secure respect for himself and credence for his assertions.

To lacemaker Lekholm's credit, however, it must, without anticipating events, be pointed out with emphasis that his claim to the title of hero acquired at a very early stage a deeper significance than sheer vanity or the necessity of dissipating the supposed incredulity of people in general. In the light his intellect was capable of casting on life and its complicated problems, the thesis, put in the briefest form possible, was this: once a hero, always a hero. And it was precisely this view which his fellow-men refused to accept

—or at any rate in his case. Their view could, in turn, be quite briefly formulated thus: that even if Pehr Lekholm, in the fight at Kolding, had in some way or other inspired a whole assaulting column to dash forward to victory, this did not alter the fact that he was just Pehr Lekholm, the little lacemaker.

Deep under his vehement and foolish attempts to gain himself credence burned another desire, more disastrous to his own future and his family's—to show his fellow-creatures the justification of his estimate of himself. He thus laid upon himself the obligation to live up to his heroic deeds, to achieve notable results despite his humble position in the community.

VI

Pehr Lekholm's first notable achievement after his return from the war was to get engaged and married. From a superficial point of view, it would hardly seem that in taking this step he had done anything which marked him out from the overwhelming majority of men. He was then nearly thirty, so that he was fully old enough to marry. Nor could it be said that he was taking upon himself a responsibility exceeding most men's capacity; his livelihood was more than secure, as he had already in name, if not yet in a pecuniary sense, taken over his father's workshop, a very good business by the standard of the time. Nor was there anything about his choice of a bride which on the whole afforded any striking contrast to the ordinary bourgeois love affair.

But in the lacemaker's eyes his conquest of his future wife was the most remarkable thing he had ever done, almost as notable as the part he had played in the fight at Kolding, although it naturally fell into a quite different

and more pleasant category of events. His fellow-creatures were ready to agree with him, in so far as they were obliged to credit him with more than normal courage in daring to link his fate with Augusta Töpfer's. In doing so they thought primarily, not so much of her personal appearance as of her established reputation for having an uncommonly strong will of her own.

Augusta Charlotte Töpfer was daughter to a German assistant surgeon who had been employed with General Cardell's artillery regiment during Karl Johan's war against Napoleon. He had accompanied the regiment back to its depot and opened a little barber's shop, where, in addition to shaving and cutting the hair of the officers and leading citizens of the town, he carried on in an inner room various activities of a "minor surgical" nature: he bled people, drew teeth, removed corns and spliced broken arms and legs.

The assistant surgeon had prospered. He had married one of the daughters of the town, bought a little two-storied wooden house in Östra Storgatan, not far from the Lekholms', and occupied his spare time with his violin and the occult writings of Swedenborg.

By reason of his tendency to mysticism and his alleged intercourse with spirits, his solitary life and his inability to acquire a mastery of the Swedish tongue, he had, in the eyes of the populace, come to be surrounded with an atmosphere of mystery. His uncanny appearance contributed in no small degree to this result—a very tall, very lean, stooping form, with deep, piercing black eyes, a long, thin, pallid face, an unusually long upper lip and a goat's beard which made his pointed chin more pointed than ever. In the little town where the force of circumstances had planted him it was not the sweep, but the surgeon, that was the children's bogey. Superstitious old women were ready to swear that his eyes burned green in the dark just like those of Old Nick himself. In reality Herr Töpfer was a peaceable, kind-

hearted old man, who worshipped, besides the one true God, his violin, Swedenborg and vegetarianism.

Despite his German birth, Herr Töpfer had won the lacemaker's genuine affection as soon as Lekholm returned from the war. The assistant surgeon, who had smelt powder himself, was the only person in the town who visibly and audibly appreciated Lekholm's act of heroism. Further, the old man took a layman's interest in strategy. And the two often spent the evening together at his house, where the surgeon followed the lacemaker on his and the Danish army's honourable retreat with many appreciative or critical comments.

It was during these evenings that love awakened and grew in the lacemaker's breast. And this love seemed to him the most remarkable thing that had ever existed of its kind.

It should be pointed out that it was not the great mystery of love itself, its electrifying effect on body and soul, that seemed to him so strange. He had experienced sensations of that kind more than once before. If the words he uttered on this subject in moments of anger, hate or humiliation were to be accepted at their face value, his wanderings as a journeyman could easily have been traced by the women's broken hearts he had left behind him on his way.

The element of romance in this love story lay in the fact that she had accepted him. For she was the most remarkable woman he had met. And according to his own account, as has been said, he had had to do with a good many.

Augusta Töpfer had never been pretty, even as a young girl. And now she was thirty-one, and definitely reckoned an old maid. Her face and figure were so like her father's that people, looking at her, noticed the absence of the goat's beard. Her undeniable disabilities in the marriage market, clear to every swain of superficial inclination, were, however, wiped out by her conspicuous qualities, at least in the eyes of a man who could appreciate moral beauty. The fact is

that she was in many respects a remarkable woman. Equipped with a keen intelligence, she was highly educated for her time and social position, and further possessed a considerable musical talent. She played the piano in a way which, in Major Rosenstjerna's firm opinion, would have made good on any concert platform in the world, if she had been trained.

It does honour to the lacemaker's instincts that her unattractive exterior did not blind him to her brilliant qualities of mind and intellect. During the whole of the first period of his marriage—not to speak of his engagement—he never grew tired of muttering to himself: "Deuce take it, I never saw a woman like my wife." In her outstanding qualities he felt that he found a complement to his own. Even the fact that she had gone through life so long unappreciated became a further merit in his eyes: she would be content with no one but a real man, a hero. He was not only happy in his choice; he was proud of his Augusta. With the generosity and sincerity of heart which had made him respond to a kindred people's cry for help in the hour of distress, he recognized her merits with unqualified enthusiasm. He was the first to admit that in his married life she represented the strong brain, the high culture, the remarkable talent, while he on his side embodied the typical quality of the male sex—courage.

Unfortunately his enthusiasm led him to quote her frequently, when with his friends and boon companions: Augusta thinks this—my wife says that—Augusta played to me yesterday till my heart melted in my body, the deuce it did. . . .

Socially, Augusta Töpfer was in no way superior to the lacemaker, although her father's solitary life and the family's abstention from intercourse with others could not fail to endow it with the mystery and dignity of the recluse. On the other hand, there was no question but that Augusta,

thanks to her musical gift, enjoyed a social position which marked her off from most of the daughters of the bourgeoisie. Thereby she shed an additional glamour over the name of Lekholm. For example, she was invited to play at gatherings at the Stadshotell, and so came into personal contact with the wives of the governor, the president of the court of justice and the colonel.

Further, she had for several years played the piano in the quartette formed by Major Rosenstjerna, known as an able violoncellist, the other two members of which were a judge named Nolleroth who played the flute and a headmaster who performed on the violin. This quartette assembled two Saturdays in each month at the house of one of the three gentlemen, and the music was followed by a supper, in which Augusta Töpfer participated as a matter of course.

The social barrier did, indeed, prevent the three from accepting an invitation which lacemaker Lekholm, after his marriage, once reverently sent them, suggesting that they should transfer the musical entertainment to his humble but well-provided home. The respect with which the three gentlemen regarded Fru Lekholm, and the musical comradeship which had arisen between them, was nevertheless, in a way, extended to the lacemaker. They returned his greetings with marked friendliness; sometimes they even stopped in the street, chatted with him, and jestingly warned him not to take up too much of his wife's time.

In short, Lekholm found that through his marriage he had acquired a social distinction which no other craftsman in the town possessed except Hofstedt, the tanner. But Hofstedt was so immensely rich that his daughter had married into the officers' corps.

As for Augusta Töpfer, her thoughts and feelings were as different as could be from the lacemaker's. He was far from being the man she had dreamed of having as a hus-

band. It was commonly asserted that she had secretly cherished other, socially loftier aspirations and had on their account refused several offers from men of her own class; it was even said that the choice of her heart was no one less than a certain lieutenant, who later became Major Rosenstjerna. It is certain at any rate that in later years she made no concealment of the fact that the lacemaker had not been her ideal husband. Moreover, she realized perfectly from the first that, as regarded qualities of head, he was but indifferently equipped. But, on the whole, she preferred Lekholm to the certain prospect of going through life in loneliness. His father's health was poor; his mother had died in child-birth several years before; in other words, she would, in all human probability, soon be mistress in her own house. And she did not consider the lacemaker too stupid to be her children's father.

In this respect he fully satisfied the hopes she had set on him; after a year's marriage Fru Augusta Lekholm gave birth to twins—a son, Per, and a daughter, Charlotte.

This happy event further strengthened the lacemaker's conviction that Augusta and he were a remarkable married couple.

VII

It was inevitable that the rumour that Fru Lekholm "wore the trousers" should spread rapidly through the town. Among the circumstances which contributed to this result were Augusta's reputation of "having a will of her own" and the lacemaker's incurable and unlucky habit of talking of her and her sayings and doings in tones which combined sincere admiration and boastful generosity. Even the difference in the height of husband and wife was probably a factor of some influence. Another factor which most cer-

tainly played a considerable part was the fact that people had, once for all, come to regard the lacemaker as a butt.

Now one cannot repeat the same joke for ever, least of all in a small town, where pleasant social life is a necessity of existence. When people had grown tired of teasing Pehr Lekholm about his military exploits, they were obliged to seek for new and still more vulnerable points. They attacked the one which for several reasons was the most obvious—the lacemaker's marriage. In doing so they may be said to have followed one of the royal roads of male jesting; a hen-pecked husband has from time immemorial been an utterly ludicrous and contemptible figure, and not least in Pehr Lekholm's prime, when submissiveness was regarded as a wife's absolute duty and a husband's supremacy was so unassailable that he was respectfully addressed, even when in bed, not as an individual, but as the representative of a large and powerful group of human beings—in this case the Lekholm family.

Certain it is that, when he had been married a few years, people began to chaff the lacemaker about the unheroic rôle he played as a husband. At the gatherings which his gregariousness prevented him from ever missing, it became customary to hint to him, by pointed allusions, that his humiliating position in his own household was no longer a secret. The attack was delivered from both flanks with cunning and tactical skill. Someone wondered if his old woman had given him leave to stay out so late. Someone else asked dubiously whether Augusta would let him have another glass.

It was not because of any particular delicacy in the insinuations made that it was some time before the lacemaker grasped the humiliating sense of the questions addressed to him. The period in which he lived was no time of half-suppressed melodies. Men were still rough and hard both

in jest and serious matters. His failure to understand was due partly to what his wife Augusta used later to call his natural foolishness and partly to his inability to take the charges seriously. Were not he and Augusta good friends, a happy married couple? Did he not admire her as much as a man could admire his wife? Was he not proud of her?

But one evening, at one of these social gatherings, he suddenly understood. He did not quite know why, but he understood, as happens once or twice in a man's life, when everything of a sudden becomes clear and the eyes seem to have acquired the gift of penetrating the thickest walls. What the devil! Did they think he was henpecked? He! He who, with a few others, had inspired a whole assaulting column to dash forward to victory! who considered himself, in his marriage, to represent the manliest of all virtues, courage! he, who had the same contempt for a henpecked husband as for a deserter in the field! . . . He twirled his moustaches, went as red as a cock's comb in the face and sprang up from his chair.

"Deuce take it, gentlemen, you don't think my wife rules me!"

Well, no, they wouldn't go so far as that. There was a good deal of gossip in the town. "They say that at home you stick your tail between your legs and make yourself scarce."

There were further moustache-twirlings.

"Surely you don't mean, gentlemen, that I, who was in the battle of Kolding, am afraid of a woman?"

Well, bigger men than he had trembled at the knees before a woman.

"Deuce take it, I never heard such a thing!"

Like the man of action he was, he took immediate steps. The lacemaker was by nature—at any rate for those days

—moderate in his consumption of strong drink. But now, as in the fight at Kolding, he would rather die than show a lack of courage. He gave them all the lie there and then, all together and each separately, by mixing himself another toddy of a mahogany-brown colour. And it was followed in the course of the evening by many others.

Late that night the lacemaker was borne home on broad though rather unsteady shoulders to the two-storied house he owned. At the foot of three age-worn stone steps, which led up to the outer door, they laid him down to find his keys, hauled him up to the door and pulled the bell-rope with a red velvet tuft on the end, a product of the Lekholm workshop. Those who had stayed on the pavement could see from the street a light struck in the bedroom, which was beyond the parlour, and a moment later the bearers heard Fru Augusta's sharp, now rather frightened voice ask inside the door:

"Who's that?"

One of the men who had carried him replied after some hesitation, disguising his voice, and to an accompaniment of suppressed giggles:

"It's Lekholm."

There was a moment's pause. Then Fru Augusta said, the fear in her voice now increased to terror:

"If you're Lekholm, you can very well open the door yourself."

No, Lekholm could not open himself.

There was another long pause. Then Fru Augusta's voice was heard again, now sunk in a hoarse whisper:

"Is he ill?"

"No, not exactly. But we'll lay him here on the mat."

They stole out and, pressed against the wall right under the two windows of the parlour and bedroom, followed in breathless silence the further development of events, listening eagerly to the words that passed between the couple as

Fru Augusta, to judge from the noise, dragged her husband into the lobby, words that on the lacemaker's side were limited to monotonous mumbled oaths, while his opponent gave proof of the possession of a considerably larger vocabulary. And when the lobby door was shut they crept off like black shadows, still keeping close to the walls, till they reached the neighbouring market-place. There they stopped, held their hands to their sides, and finally burst into roars of laughter which echoed in the Trinity Church's hallowed walls and woke all the sleeping dogs in the town.

They had not had such fun since goodness knew when. And they looked forward with joyful anticipation to the rich harvest whose seed had been sown that night.

Events developed very rapidly in the Lekholm family. The day after that night of degradation the lacemaker had stayed in bed and accepted submissively and without protest the spiritual and physical attentions his wife bestowed on him. Even when, in the evening, she declined to brew him the fortifying toddy his alcohol-poisoned body required in order to sleep peacefully—explaining fully her reasons for so doing—he submitted to her decided refusal, not without a bitter grumble into his pillows. For the next two or three days the lacemaker performed his tasks in the attic and at the loom with the new and savage energy which, in a decent well-conducted man, usually follows an alcoholic outbreak. In a few days more this energy was reduced to its normal everyday dimensions, and the lacemaker was again the man he had been before the night of degradation. At least he considered that he was.

Unfortunately his wife did not share his view, which he fully realized when a fortnight later, as every Saturday, he left the loom at five o'clock and went downstairs to change his clothes.

When, after washing and changing his underclothes, he

opened the wardrobe door to take out his Sunday tail-coat, it was not there.

At first the good-natured fellow did not realize the situation. He called to his wife in the kitchen:

"Augusta, where's my best coat?"

"I'm coming, I'm coming."

A minute later she came in, shutting the door carefully so as not to be overheard by the servant, the two journeymen and the apprentices, who were just having their supper.

"Your best coat, Lekholm?" she said quietly, with an emphasis on every word. "I've locked it up. What do you want it for this evening, anyhow?"

The lacemaker looked at her.

"What do I want it for? You know it's the craftsmen's association's evening at the Schweden to-night."

Augusta Lekholm's voice was calmer than ever, and the words fell one by one, weighty as the phrases of the Catechism:

"It'll be a long time before you go to any more evenings, Lekholm."

Now the lacemaker understood. If this incident had taken place many years later, and the lacemaker had known the German language and been intimately acquainted with its modern poetry, he might at that moment have quoted the immortal opening to one of Rilke's most beautiful poems. *Mit einmal weiss ich viel von der Fontäne!* It would, no doubt, have expressed just what he felt. So she meant to have her revenge! That was why she had stopped abusing him the first day he was up and about again. And he had thought that she was so submissive because his newborn ferocity had made her respect him. Oho—so that was what she was after. Oho! He twirled his moustache and said:

"Well, that's the deuce. You've locked up my best coat."

"I have," his wife replied, "and you won't see it again for a long time except when you go to church."

The lacemaker put his hands on his hips, advanced his left foot a half pace in front of the right, puffed out his chest and regarded her.

"Deuce take it, Augusta, hand over that coat!"

She looked down at him with a gleam of contempt in her black eyes.

"You're a fool, Lekholm, a silly idiot! You make yourself a laughing-stock in everyone's eyes. I've always thought that, but I've never said it till now. But now I'll say it so that you can hear it!"

The lacemaker planted his right foot a half pace before his left.

"I don't care a damn for that. But if you lock up my best coat I'll go as I am in my working clothes. And then people'll know you're a vixen. For that matter, they all know it already. It's only I who've been such a fool that I didn't realize it till now. Hand over the coat, I tell you. Deuce take it!"

There was a moment's silence. Fru Lekholm had turned as white as a corpse. And she smiled, a peculiar smile which the lacemaker had never seen before.

"Who says I'm a vixen?" she asked, with an ominous quiet.

"Everyone! everyone! the deuce! give me my coat!"

She did not answer for a moment. She only nodded two or three times. Then she turned round.

"You shall have your coat, Lekholm."

The lacemaker took the coat, put it on, and went to the craftsmen's association's evening.

There was not a single man in the lacemaker's day, and very few in ours, who would not have acted as he did, or at any rate, if for one reason or another he had acted differently, would not have sympathized with Lekholm in the course he had taken. And there have been many and still

are some men, who, like the lacemaker, would have emphasized their independence by coming home drunk.

By her method of reforming her husband, Augusta Lekholm had done something very serious—she had set the lacemaker's thinking apparatus working. And this was all the more dangerous in that this apparatus—apart from its never having been seriously used before—gave every indication of being simple and elementary in its construction.

All that evening, at the gathering, Pehr Lekholm thought.

That she had called him a fool and a silly idiot mattered nothing to him. He had never claimed to be any kind of genius; from the first he had frankly acknowledged her undeniable superiority in intelligence, as also in education and musical talent. (It would in any case have been superfluous for the lacemaker to emphasize her superiority in the last-named field, for he had no feeling whatever for music beyond his admiration of skill with the fingers, which as a lacemaker he could fully appreciate.)

But by locking up his best coat she had shown that she doubted his courage; and this wounded him to the inmost depths of his being. He, who had taken part in the fight at Kolding and inspired a whole assaulting column to dash on to victory, who had made his contribution, gratefully recognized by the State of Denmark, to the first cohesion of the Scandinavian peoples in the hour of danger—that he should not dare take a coat out of a locked cupboard! What the deuce was she thinking of? Who did she suppose he was? Did *she*, too, think his stories of the war were lies? Deuce take it, he must make an example! This was war! And war was something he understood.

Moreover, Augusta Lekholm, by her impulsive method of education, had also succeeded in offending the lacemaker's sense of justice. As he sat there among his boon companions, the degrading punishment she had desired to inflict

seemed out of all proportion to his offence. He had come home dead drunk. Quite true. But what if he had? He was not the first man in the world's history who had made a slip of the kind. Such things had happened, and still happened, to men of greater distinction and higher position in the town than himself. And that a woman, for a reason like that, should wish to deprive a man of the only real reward for his week's toil was too much for his comprehension and for his kindly heart's universal good will.

Her trick injured him the more deeply in that, as previously indicated, his coat was too short to be turned into the soft, capacious cloak of the recluse or misanthrope. He was a gregarious animal in the literal sense of the word. He loved, after his week's labour, the clink of glasses, the speeches over the punch-bowl, the free jesting, the smell of beefsteaks, the kaleidoscopic abundance of the *hors d'œuvre*. He was a cheerful person by nature. But cheerfulness, in his view, ought to be a collective quality. It blossomed most freely in company. If he were forbidden to attend the craftsmen's association's evenings and similar functions, it simply meant that he was deprived of the reward of his week's labour, his whole life turned to one long working week-day. And that was what she had tried to do. Damned cat!

And she had done more than that. She had meant to humiliate him to a degree beyond anything his friends had ever dared. Their jokes had never been so base, so devilish. Lock up his Sunday coat! Prevent him from coming to the gatherings! And suppose he had been such a weakling as to stay at home, to keep away till she was graciously pleased to let him have his coat back! What would have happened then? His friends and colleagues would have laughed till their sides split. That was what the consequences would have been if he had let himself be intimidated. It was really *she*, and not his friends, who was trying to make a fool of him. His friends were right; she was a vixen. Damned cat!

If they thought she ruled the roost, they were quite wrong. Your best!

If the lacemaker's behaviour that evening meets with a certain degree of comprehension even from men of our own day, to whom the idea of being dominated by a woman no longer signifies the nadir of degradation, it is equally certain that some women of the present time, who are as anxious as Fru Lekholm to bring up their husbands in the way they should go, will doubt whether her educational method was the right one.

Indeed, she herself discovered in her old age that, however admirable her object of reforming her husband had been, her method had been ill chosen. At least, she once confessed it herself to her children and grandchildren. Her husband was ill with pneumonia, and both the nature of the illness and the patient's great age made recovery unlikely. The seriousness of the moment softened her bitterness. A life of scolding at an obstinate husband gave place, in the hour, as she thought, of final separation, to a degree of gentleness and self-reproach. She vowed that *she* had not been the original cause of the degradation and ridicule into which Lekholm in the course of years had plunged her, himself and his whole family. Before that unfortunate night when he had had to be carried home she had never uttered one word or made one gesture to show what a silly fool she thought him. And Heaven knew there had been cause enough.

It was above all the force of circumstances—unhappy circumstances—which had by degrees transformed her into the shrew all saw in her—her husband, her children, her grandchildren, her servants, her fellow-creatures. She could prove that she had not been a devil from birth. She had been born and brought up in a God-fearing home. From her universally respected father, who had held his head upright through all the changes and chances of life, she had

learned to know her place, as a daughter in the house, as a wife in the home, as a woman in the community. Long before she married Lekholm she knew that a woman should obey her husband. God had arranged and ordered it so. She had never interfered in what he did—until, unhappily, it was too late. And she only asked her children whether both they and their offspring would not have had quite another and a more promising future before them if she had taken charge of affairs long before she was compelled to do so.

Nor had she ever, on any occasion, wished to prevent Lekholm from going to the café. She had wanted him to have his amusement like other decent men. But she appealed to her children: how could she have acted otherwise after he had been borne home like a corpse on that fatal evening? And with his accursed obstinacy, worse than a mule's! They must remember that she had been born and brought up not only in a God-fearing, but in a temperate home. She had never seen a drunken man in her father's house. He had taught her to hold them in horror. And when Lekholm paid court to her, it was just on the fact that he was known as a decent, sober tradesman that her father had laid emphasis. And he was to come home from every gathering drunk, for years on end.

If they only had an idea how many tears she had shed and what sufferings she had endured because she knew what a laughing-stock he was making himself in the eyes of God and men. And the tipsier he became, the more absurdly he behaved. Ought she not to have prevented him? She had known from the beginning, or at least had a feeling, that he at bottom was nothing of a man, for all the heroic deeds of which he bragged. But she wished to keep up appearances, at least to the world. She wanted people to think she was married to a man and not to a fool. She knew what they had said when she accepted Lekholm—that she could get no one else. Every time people made mock of him, their

mockery pierced her heart like a knife. Did they think it was any pleasure to be regarded as a shrew? That was all she wanted to say in her own defence—now, by his death-bed.

It might be that she had acted rather thoughtlessly that time when she had locked up his best coat. But after all . . . And she would not have given up the coat that time, if he had not said that everyone thought her a vixen. She a vixen! It had deprived her of all power of resistance. She felt that nothing else signified anything. Lekholm, the idiot, could at that moment have taken not only his Sunday coat but everything he possessed. He could have carried off the whole house without her being able to stir a finger. She had felt it so much. It was as if she had stood naked in the pillory in the market-place. She, who loved music, who could interpret the piety of Bach, the profundity of Beethoven, the seriousness of Handel, the charm of Mozart—that she should be regarded by the craftsmen of the town, men who had grown up as plain, rough-hewn journeymen, as a common scold!

And anyhow, if she had not handed over the coat that time, things would have turned out just the same. She knew her Lekholm. They could take it from her!

VIII

The handing over of the locked-up Sunday coat was not the only incident of that evening which had such a decisive influence on the Lekholms' married happiness. On his return home—as on his departure—the lacemaker had a surprise. And now, as eight or ten hours earlier, a key played a part of special significance. Fru Lekholm never referred to this scene in her old age unless directly reminded of it

by her husband. In her eyes it was only a logical solution of the problem which lay at the root of the tail-coat quarrel. The lacemaker, for his part, was of quite another opinion. In his view his married life would have taken quite a different course if his reception by Augusta had been other than it was.

As far as can be judged, there are no factors which directly challenge his assertion, especially in view of his good nature and his power of forgetting an injury.

The lacemaker had on the whole enjoyed his evening. He could, on the whole, be said to have conquered all along the line; he had compelled his wife to produce the coat from the wardrobe; he had, in his own view, turned the edge of his friends' ridicule by a double manifestation of his absolute independence; he had gone to the gathering, and had drunk of his own accord several ostentatiously dark toddies. He felt that he had had something resembling a triumph that evening, and made his way home with more tender feelings in his heart. That he was drunk he denied to his last day, but he was certainly in a jovial mood, ready to forgive his wife and bury the wrong perpetrated earlier in the evening in oblivion and his own bosom.

He walked home with two or three friends who lived in the same direction. He stood with them for a long time at the foot of his stone flight of steps, discussing the affairs of the world. Everything was apparently quiet in the house; the light was out in his and Augusta's bedroom; the arch of heaven lay above them in all the glory of a cold winter night, thickly dusted with stars.

He shook hands in farewell with his companions, ascended the two steps up to the outer door, unlocked it, shut it, opened the lobby door, shut that too, hung up his hat and overcoat and was about to go into the parlour, when—what the deuce! What was the matter with the door? It would not open. . . .

Struggle with the lock as he might, the thing seemed bewitched. He passed his hand across his forehead, a sudden prey to the painful uncertainty which comes over a man when he suddenly finds himself confronted with the inexplicable. What had happened? Where was he? He lit another match and looked round. No, there was no mistake about it. He was in his own lobby. He looked carefully at the lock as long as the match gave light, then felt it again carefully in the dark, and stood still for a long time with his back to the wall, thinking. . . .

And suddenly it dawned upon him. She had put the catch up. . . . The damned cat had locked him out; he supposed she wanted him to sleep on the floor in the lobby. . . .

He stood absolutely motionless, muttering to himself: damned cat, the devil take her! . . . Here he had come home, filled with thoughts of peace and reconciliation and affection . . . and she had shut the door. . . . A damned vixen! . . . For a few short minutes his heart was melted at the thought of all the tenderness he had felt for her in the last few hours. He was sorry for himself. It was not only that he, the hero of Kolding, should be treated like a dog by a hag of a woman. But that his kind heart should have cherished tender feelings for her, that . . . that. . . . No, the deuce! . . . The next moment he had made a run at the door and delivered a double kick on it.

"Open the door, I tell you. Open the door!"

There was no answer from within. But he heard a roar of laughter out in the street. It came from his friends, who had waited outside to hear what kind of reception he would get. His shouts had been heard through the pane of glass which admitted light from the street. And the laugh was followed by a cry of encouragement.

"Can't you get into your room, lacemaker? Do you want any help?"

The lacemaker became perfectly quiet again. He put his

back to the wall again and thought. He was quite sober now, absolutely sober. His brain was working at high pressure. Now he would once more be the talk and laughing-stock of the whole town. The very next day everyone would know how he had been shamed and humiliated.

It was a little while before he had made up his mind how he must act. He felt once more as if he were on the field, out alone on a dangerous patrol, where any hasty step might be fatal.

He could have broken the door in if he had liked. But if he had done so, his companions outside would have had all the more to tell; besides, he would wake the whole house, the court copyist and his sister, who lived on the floor above, the servant, and perhaps the journeymen and apprentices as well. He passed his hand again across his forehead, which was covered with perspiration from the mental strain he had been through.

"Deuce take it, Lekholm, you've got to take this business quietly and sensibly. You must be careful how you act."

And without uttering another word, except to murmur under his breath that he had bivouacked under the open sky in earlier days, he took off his overcoat quietly and peaceably, went up to the attic and curled himself up on the floor with a piece of matting under him, a bale of wool braid for a pillow and his thick winter coat laid over him. He did not sleep well. But nevertheless he smiled—a strange smile, quite new to him.

"The deuce! You'll pay for this, you cat!"

Just before five in the morning, before the inmates of the house got up, he crept down from the attic again, opened the lobby door and cautiously felt the lock of the parlour door, which she had unfastened some time in the course of the night. He was trembling and shivering with cold. His face was white, his nose and lips blue. His moustaches hung from the corners of his mouth like a walrus's whiskers.

He presented a most ridiculous and at the same time lamentable appearance. But if Augusta could have seen his soul at that moment she would have recoiled in horror at the sight. It was not only his body which had frozen that night; his heart had turned to stone. And something else had happened to him as well. The moment out in the lobby when he saw light, when the secret of the lock was suddenly revealed to him, was the third and last time in his life that he understood, that he realized the position. From that moment on he only thought, brooded over a scheme of revenge.

He did not open any conversation with his wife while he took off his best coat and crept into his working clothes. His taciturnity might have seemed ominous to anyone else than Augusta; and perhaps it would have seemed so to her, if she had remembered the part he had played in the fight at Kolding. But during her three years of married life nothing had been farther from her than the association of Lekholm's personality with any act of heroism. She took his silence as a sign that she had really crushed him, broken his obstinacy for ever.

Like the man of action he was, and with the quickness that characterized his work as a craftsman, he put his plan into execution as quickly as possible. He did not leave his home during the whole of the week that followed. He went about his daily work, to all appearance as though he had been subjected to no humiliation. The only change noticeable in him was that he put as much fresh energy into his work as if a new Government contract had been at stake. But at the same time he was in the best of humours, which was not customary with him on such occasions, and sang the Danish song, *Den tapre Landssoldat*, from morning till night.

At one o'clock on Saturday he left the workshop without saying a word to his men, went to the market, where he bought several pounds of beefsteak, and obtained some

brandy and toddy. He conveyed all these articles in by the door opening into Smalgatan and up to a safe hiding-place in the attic, without anyone noticing either his absence or his mysterious proceedings on his return. At four o'clock—an hour earlier than usual—when he knew that Augusta was out making her last purchases at Hintze's, the grocer's—he went down to the bedroom, had a wash, changed his underclothing and put on his Sunday suit.

At half-past four exactly the lacemaker left his house, ten minutes or a quarter of an hour before Augusta might be expected to return. Having plenty of time on his hands, he went for a short walk outside the town and then returned to the Schweden, where he found some of his companions assembled—craftsmen and tradesmen who, like the lacemaker, celebrated the arrival of the Sabbath every Saturday night. There was a lot of joking about his having been locked out, and finally the court copyist Lind, who lived with his sister on the floor above the Lekholms and was known for his intellectual brilliance, summed up the whole situation in a witty, malicious pun which made them nearly choke with laughter. And the curious thing was that the lacemaker himself laughed.

"Deuce take it, I'll tell my wife that when I get home to-night."

"Oh, I say, go easy, Lekholm, you don't say so much when you get home at night; we know that."

Unfortunately there was a hitch in the lacemaker's plan right at the beginning; or it would perhaps be more correct to say that things did not happen quite in accordance with his calculations. He had expected that at about half-past six or seven, when she had waited for him till her patience was exhausted, Augusta would send one of the apprentices to find him and ask him to come home. He had his answer ready:

"Say that I shall come when I please."

But no apprentice came. That was a thing he had not counted on. He scratched his head: what the deuce could the baggage be up to? Had she suspected anything? Perhaps she had made a search and found the provisions and got an inkling of his plan? He reflected for a few moments as to whether he should steal home and see whether the beefsteak and the drinks were still where he had put them. But the ex-volunteer from the Danish war saw the necessity of suppressing his natural curiosity in the interests of high strategy.

On those Saturdays which were not a special occasion the gathering used to break up at eleven o'clock. But before they separated that evening, the lacemaker tapped on his glass, rose and said:

"Gentlemen and friends, you are welcome to my home now to eat a little beefsteak with onions, empty a glass or two and drink a little something when you go."

They stared at him. What the deuce! What had come over the lacemaker? But he only smiled.

"Deuce take it!" he said, with a twirl of his moustaches, "don't you believe there is any food and drink in the house? I've been out myself and bought two pounds of beefsteak, and brandy and toddy. Don't you believe me now? Or perhaps it's you who are afraid of my dear little wife? If so, I'll only say that you have misjudged her. She's as quiet as a lamb, and she and I are the best of friends. She'll show you that to-night. Come along! You'll be welcome—I promise you that."

The lacemaker had grown fierce as he delivered his invitation. He felt as if his heart had shut like a fist that trembled with longing to strike. Now they should see, by Gad! Now he would show them who they had been making fun of. He would like to know if they still took him for a fool after what was going to happen to-night. Now—now, by all the devils in hell, they should see a man who

had been in the fight at Kolding, and plenty of others, too!

He twirled his moustache again and raised his right arm in the air like a company commander in the field:

"Forward, march, boys!"

Several refused to obey orders even before the march had begun. And the column which formed up outside the Schweden under the lacemaker's command and marched across the Little Market in the clear winter night and turned into Östra Storgatan, had no little resemblance to that which had recoiled before Kolding. They advanced slowly, as though they might expect to fall into an ambush at any moment, so that the lacemaker was far ahead of the rest as he strode on with long steps, muttering fearful threats and swinging his Spanish cane like a sabre. A hundred yards or so from his front steps he began to trot, which further increased his lead. His anger was by now exalted to a holy wrath. He talked to himself under his breath:

"Now, by Gad, now I'm going to put a stop to this. I've been a butt and a henpecked husband long enough. Now the baggage shall see who's master in this house, she or I, and all the others, too. Now you'll get beefsteak and onions till your nostrils are full of it, you set of asses, who sat at home when I was risking my life in the war. Now! now!"

He reached his own house, bounded up the three steps like a leopard and hammered on the door with his clenched fists:

"Open the door, Augusta, open it, or the deuce——!"

The others had stopped for a moment to watch his proceedings. Then they advanced again slowly, all except the copyist, who hurried forward to be at hand if needed. The situation was becoming more and more of a puzzle to him, as to the others.

The lacemaker thumped on the door again.

"Open the door, Augusta, I tell you, or, the deuce——!"

The copyist had joined him.

"What are you yelling for, you lunatic? If you've forgotten your key, I can open the door for you."

The lacemaker pushed the copyist down the steps.

"Don't interfere. The hostess shall receive her guests at the door."

He attacked the door again.

"Open the door, I tell you, or, deuce take it——! We're going to have beefsteak and onions and brandy and toddy. I've got the grub up in the attic. You've only got to put your clothes on, old woman, and do some cooking. Open the door, open the door, I tell you, or——"

The copyist had reascended the three steps. But he was pushed down again:

"Keep your hands off, please. And hold your tongue. Don't interfere! No one but me understands this business. Open, you damned cat, or I'll break in the door. Don't you hear what I say?"

At that moment the door was actually opened. The great key was hesitatingly and creakingly turned in the old lock. The door groaned and was slowly opened an inch or two. There was a glimpse of a tall white form inside.

The lacemaker flung the door wide open.

"I want beefsteak and onions," he yelled, blind with fury at her not having opened the door earlier. "Beefsteak and onions, I tell you! And deuce take it, I'll make you stir your stumps, too!"

A second later he had given the white figure a resounding box on the ear. The white figure uttered a scream:

"Help, help, he'll kill me!"

She fell backwards, struck her head against the banisters of the staircase which led up to the rooms where the copyist and his sister lived, screamed again and fell to the floor with a thud.

The copyist, after the lacemaker had pushed him down the steps for a second time, had joined the other guests.

All were growing more and more dubious and irresolute. But the copyist recognized his own sister's voice calling for help. He leapt to her aid, caught hold of the lacemaker in the darkness and gripped him in combat. Several of the other guests moved off in silence, while three or four advanced hesitatingly to the steps to see what could be done.

Augusta Lekholm, who that night had again fastened the door between the lobby and the parlour, had lain in bed listening to her husband's heathenish noise with a chilly smile on her lips, cold despair in her heart and an inflexible determination to go to her own home next day with the twins until the lacemaker gave satisfactory assurances of complete surrender in the future.

But when she heard the cry she leapt out of bed, lit a candle and, with a quaking heart, hurried to the door. There, to her consternation, she found Mamsell Lind sitting on the stairs that led to her rooms, with blood running down her face on to her nightgown from a wound in the scalp. On the floor lay in a tangle the copyist Lind, the looking-glass maker Säfberg, the girdler Olsson and—on top of them all—her own husband. The little lacemaker seemed to have been inspired with the strength of a lion and the suppleness of a leopard. He struck, kicked, bit, panted and swore. He trembled and gnashed his teeth as he groaned:

"Now, now, now, deuce take it! I'll put a stop to this!"

"Lekholm, Lekholm! Good heavens, Lekholm, what are you doing?" she cried, when, after a moment's thought, she had succeeded in unravelling the tangle and more or less realizing the situation. "Lekholm, don't you hear what I say?"

She seized one of his coat-tails and pulled with all her might. But the lacemaker was beyond hearing and feeling. He only continued to shout:

"Now, now, now, deuce take it! I'm going to put a stop to this!" . . .

And he did put an end to it. After that evening of bloodshed and disturbance the lacemaker assumed and for many years held the place in his home which God and the Church, by the words of the Marriage Service, had reserved for him. He had nearly frightened the life out of Augusta. When at last she had succeeded, not without some damage to her nightdress, in tearing him from his opponents' grasp and had got him into the bedroom, where she meant to deal with his behaviour in the most moderate language possible, his fury broke out again. Once more he began to tremble all over, to grind his teeth, with flashing eyes and fists clenched till they grew white at the knuckles. He leapt into the air several times with both feet together, shouting:

"Silence, woman, silence! This is all your doing, you vixen. I'll have silence here—the silence of the grave. Or else I don't know what I may not do."

Augusta looked at the little man—she may be said to have looked him up and down, as her greater height compelled her to do. But only for a few brief seconds. For she had met the look in the eyes of a man who had been driven to the uttermost length, to the limit of reasoned action. She felt at that moment to her frozen marrow that the man before her would not shrink from murder.

And she said nothing. She said nothing for many years. The lacemaker only needed to thump the table and say: "Silence, the silence of the grave—or I don't know what I may not do." No more was needed to stifle any objection or opposition from her side. For behind the words she always saw the raving Lekholm of that sanguinary evening, the man of superhuman strength, the hero of Kolding.

Nor was she the only person who, after the fight at the front-door, which had been the subject of universal discus-

sion and comment, took another view of Pehr Lekholm. Certainly he remained absurd. But people did not dare chaff him so openly as before. Allusions to his foolishness always had to be so veiled that he did not understand them. If they were too obvious, his eyes flashed as much as to say: "Silence, or I don't know what I may not do." The lacemaker had, in other words, succeeded in making himself respected.

Nor was this all. Everyone now realized what people had at first been unable to understand, with the result that they had made light of his exploits—that forces were alive in him which, in the hour of danger or of exaltation, *could* make a hero of him.

With the fight at the front-door, which attained wide celebrity in the town, began Pehr Anders Lekholm's time of greatness. And at the same time, it may be said, his history left the realms of legend and heroic exploit for the firmer ground of economic reality.

He had won a victory on two fronts. He had gained his companions' respect in so far as they no longer dared chaff him openly, and at the same time he had made himself master in his own house to such a degree that he could henceforward come home from his convivial gatherings in whatever state he pleased, quite sober or intoxicated, without Fru Augusta Lekholm daring to complain.

But there was something which made it impossible for him to rest on the laurels he had won, respectable as they were. There was still one slur to be wiped out; his wife had called him a fool and an idiot. It was perfectly true that he could not play the piano or talk German as well as Fru Augusta. He had, moreover, hitherto readily and generously admitted that in his home his wife represented both the higher education and the keener intelligence, while he himself completed the picture as the representative of courage. His restless spirit now desired nothing more or less than to show his superiority in the intellectual domain also, and in

one way or another establish his renown for all time in that field as well. Only then would he be able to live free and happy.

It was at this juncture in the history of the Lekholm family that the lacemaker's brother, Oscar, appeared on the scene, to play the leading rôle for many years to come and reduce Pehr to a figure, certainly not unimportant, but of the second rank.

This Oscar was born in 1838, so that he was fourteen years younger than Pehr. He was one of those children who come into the world more or less as Isaac did; their mothers have stood behind the door and smiled. Oscar's mother had paid for her smiling with her life; she was in any case rather old to have a child, and then she had contracted puerperal fever and died a fortnight after the boy's birth. Oscar had been a delicate boy all through his childhood and earliest youth; every time he was attacked by a childish ailment he had nearly died.

When Pehr Lekholm came home from the Slesvig war he had, as was mentioned earlier, taken over the workshop for practical purposes, if not in name. His father, who suffered severely from gout, moved with Oscar into the rooms on the first floor, and there the old man died in 1851 of ague, which ravaged the town that winter. Then Oscar moved down to his brother's part of the house and lived with the apprentices in a little room looking on to the yard, while the first-floor rooms were let to the court copyist Lind and his sister.

Oscar had duly been sent to the grammar school, in which the lacemaker himself had gone through three classes, and owing to his poor constitution had stayed on year after year without either the lacemaker or himself coming to any decision about his future. But now he had reached the age when a decision must be made. He had himself no

definite wishes. The lacemaker scratched his head when he thought of the boy. What should he do with him? There was no go about him. He had always been quiet, uncommunicative and reserved. He spent most of his time sitting over a book. One summer he had helped with the spinning up in the attic, but he had not put his back into the work. And now he had risen so high in the school that he could hardly be trained as a craftsman. The lacemaker thought the matter over and came to the conclusion that he would perhaps do best behind a counter—faking the weights when customers were not looking, sitting and writing figures in an account-book, or something in that line. One thing was certain: he was no good as a craftsman. Pehr Lekholm had already spoken of him several times to Johan Hintze, and wondered whether a place could be found for him among the casks of herrings and sacks of flour. But Hintze thought the boy was not strong enough.

“Serving in a shop’s not like sitting at a loom; it needs a man’s strength.”

The lacemaker had to abandon the idea of his brother and protégé serving in a shop, and thought of apprenticing him to Sjögren to learn watchmaking. That ought to be a quiet enough profession!

The lacemaker was worried about Oscar. And even if he did not take a gloomy view of the boy’s future, he had never dreamt that through him would come the opportunity of removing the slur Augusta had cast upon him when she called him a fool.

And yet this was the case.

About six o’clock one Saturday evening at the end of April the lacemaker and the other members of the “monthly bath” club were sitting in the bath-house, sweating, scratching their backs and exchanging such ideas as the situation and temperature suggested to them. The schoolmaster Browallius came in, and Lekholm was introduced to him.

They had run up against each other several times at the meetings of the education circle. And hardly two months earlier Browallius and his wife had been to the shop to buy two or three yards of black material to ornament a coffin; their newly born child had died, and this melancholy occurrence had given the lacemaker an opportunity of remarking, as he handed over the little parcel, that the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away, and that men must praise His holy name and obey His commandments. The fat schoolmaster was short-sighted, and without his glasses had some difficulty in finding his way in the feeble light of the bath-house. The lacemaker, however, rose when he saw him and said:

"Please sit here, *Herr Doktor*, I'll move along and make room."

The schoolmaster blinked; he had obviously not recognized the lacemaker. The latter accordingly bowed and murmured his name; and the schoolmaster sat down beside him. As they sat there, scratching their backs, chests and arms, the lacemaker suddenly had an idea—an idea which was to decide the fate of Oscar, himself and his whole family. Suppose he asked Dr. Browallius about Oscar's future? . . . He had, as has been said, had earlier contact with him both on the ideal plane—in the education circle—and on the commercial plane, when he sold the material for the coffin. It could, therefore, hardly seem presumptuous or too familiar if he now, with a simple question, asked the schoolmaster's advice in a family matter.

"Excuse my troubling you, *Herr Doktor*," he said, "but I have a younger brother and, so to speak, protégé, who is one of your pupils, and with regard to whose future I feel a certain anxiety, if I may so express myself."

"Excuse me, but what is your name?" asked Browallius, who had not caught the name when the lacemaker bowed to him.

"Lekholm. Master-lacemaker Lekholm. You did me the honour of making a small purchase from me on the occasion of the loss of your youngest child."

"I know, I know. But why are you anxious about your brother's future?"

Lekholm explained his meaning in a long and round-about oration. Before he had finished, the schoolmaster interrupted him.

"Why not let the boy go to the university, and possibly, if ways and means allow, read for Holy Orders? His mental abilities are of such an order that they deserve a chance of further development. Besides, from my knowledge of him, and from what I have seen of his general behaviour, he seems to be of a quiet and meditative disposition. So why not let the boy continue his studies, if, as I said just now, ways and means allow of it?"

No one knowing the lacemaker's impressionable and at the same time proud nature, and his childish wealth of imagination, will have any difficulty in understanding what effect these words had upon him. Oscar had mental abilities! They ought to be further developed! Oscar was of a quiet and meditative disposition! Oscar should be a student! A Lekholm a student! A Lekholm with a university degree. . . . That was something quite new in the history of that family of craftsmen, a thing he himself had never dreamed of for all his power of imagination. His only brother at a university! What lustre would he not cast upon the family name! The lacemaker already saw himself visiting Oscar at Lund and drinking toddy with his friends, men of learning. His brother Oscar a clergyman! Perhaps he would even see the day on which his own brother would preach in Trinity Church itself, from whose pulpit, famous throughout the kingdom for its beauty, so many eloquent preachers had interpreted God's word!

The very thought filled him with enthusiasm. A brother

of his student and clergyman. . . . No other craftsman in the town had such a thing. . . . Through the puny little Oscar he would himself attain a social position all the heroic deeds in the world could not have secured him; he, master-lacemaker Lekholm, had a brother a student, studying at the university. . . .

To the crackling, shining firework display of imagery which Dr. Browallius's words had called into being in his naïve and impressionable mind, there was added a few moments later one rocket excelling all the others in brilliance and splendour. Augusta would not be able to call him a fool any longer now! Had he not a brother who was to take his degree at the university? She had none. One of her brothers was nothing more than a barber, and the other was behind a counter in a shop in Malmö. But he, the lacemaker, had a brother who was to be a student. What did that prove? Why, if his father had not apprenticed him at fourteen, but had let him continue his studies, who knew but that he himself would not have given proof of the same intellectual capacities as Oscar? Why not? Who could prove the contrary? Was not the presumption rather, seeing that Oscar had brains and they were brothers, that he himself had similar mental abilities, although they had never been tested? Who could prove the contrary?

It was a long time before the lacemaker could pull himself together sufficiently to stammer a reply to Dr. Browallius.

"It's worth thinking about," he said, although he had already made his decision, "and as for ways and means, that could be managed. The boy has inherited half the freehold from his father, and the house is valued at over six thousand riksdaler."

Browallius smiled.

"Men have become bishops on less," he said.

When the lacemaker came home that night from the

convivial gathering at the Schweden, he went straight into the apprentices' bedroom and shook Oscar till he woke.

"You're to be a student!"

Oscar rubbed his eyes. At the sight of his brother and guardian, with inflamed countenance and smelling of toddy, he feared some berserk outbreak, and held both hands before his face in alarm.

The lacemaker shook him again.

"Don't you hear what I say? You're to be a student! And then you're to read theology and be a clergyman. Dr. Browallius and I have put our wise heads together and decided the matter. And now you've got to put your back into it. The deuce you have!"

Then he went into the bedroom and aroused his wife, who was only pretending to be asleep.

"Who was it who always said I was a fool?"

Augusta protested. She too was alarmed at his resolute and martial aspect.

"Go to bed, Lekholm dear. You'll wake the children."

The lacemaker twirled his moustache.

"I want to know first who it was that called me a fool."

"Perhaps I may have once, Lekholm, years ago. . . ."

"Once! Often! But anyhow you admit having called me a fool?"

"Yes, yes, Lekholm, only don't wake the children."

The lacemaker stepped a pace nearer the bed, put his hands on his hips and said:

"Look at me!"

"Yes, yes, I'm looking, I'm looking."

"I only want to tell you that Oscar is to be a student and read for Holy Orders. Dr. Browallius and I agreed on that this evening. Do you hear what I say?"

"Yes, yes, Lekholm, I hear, I hear."

The lacemaker put the other foot forward.

"Well, what does that prove?"

"Why, it proves that Browallius thinks he has brains."

"But what does it prove as regards myself?"

"I don't understand what you're driving at, Lekholm, I really don't."

"You don't understand; you, with your good brains and your musical talent. I understand. But do you know what it proves? It proves that I, as Oscar's blood-brother, am not the fool you think I am. *Do you understand now?*"

Now one of the twins began to cry. Augusta protested:

"Didn't I say so, Lekholm? Now you've woken the children."

"Woken them? That's just what I mean to do—wake them! My boys shall be students, the whole lot of them, as many as you give me. *That's what I'm good for!*"

The lacemaker, without knowing what he did, had uttered the fatal words, and had made demands on himself and his posterity the full bearing of which neither he nor any other person on earth at that moment could grasp or foresee. Sooner or later the dream of a university degree would have attracted some member of the Lekholm family, as for over a century it has attracted and still attracts every Swedish family which longs to rise above the mass and move in a loftier, freer sphere.

But, as it happened, it was the lacemaker, Pehr Anders Lekholm, who had dreamed the dream and, late one Saturday night, uttered the fatal words:

"My boys shall be students, the whole lot, as many as you give me."

From the moment when the puny weakling Oscar, whom they had not known what to do with, revealed himself as a future servant of the Lord, the lacemaker, with his customary enthusiasm, made the boy's future his whole interest in life. Certainly Oscar could not have a separate room for his studies: space conditions forbade that. The two apprentices were enjoined to keep as quiet as mice in the

den they shared with him when Oscar was "working."

But he ought to and should have better food, and he alone of the whole family was regaled with an egg for breakfast. The lacemaker knew that a working brain required plenty of nourishment; an apprentice or a young journeyman could make do with whatever came along, and he himself was content so long as he could fill his stomach; but a young man who was doing brainwork must fill his brain, and as food for the brain there was nothing like hen's eggs. An egg contained, in the lacemaker's frequently expressed opinion, all the nourishment which was later rediscovered in the adult fowl.

So the lacemaker incorporated Oscar's success with his own, and his life during the next ten years became a kind of magnified reflection of his brother's. One September day, when he was eighteen, Oscar returned from Lund, where he had matriculated and been entered as a member of the university. His head was crowned with the blue Lund student's cap. The lacemaker took a holiday from the workshop that day and did not leave Oscar's side; they walked together up and down the two main streets, and in the evening Pehr Lekholm gave a party at the Schweden in his brother's honour, to which all his own boon companions were invited.

Oscar had passed his examination so well that he had been allowed to live out for the next three terms on a Count's estate not very far from his native place, and he occasionally visited the town in the Count's carriage and even in the company of the Count and Countess.

That Christmas he sprang a further surprise on his brother and guardian. He declared that he would rather read medicine than theology. The lacemaker stared at him with his mouth half open, twirled his moustaches, and said:

"Are you as clever as all that?"

"Clever? What do you mean?"

"What do I mean? Deuce take it! I'm not so stupid that I don't understand that one needs much more brains to become a doctor than a clergyman."

Oscar considered that from the point of view of brains there would be no difficulty; it was only a question of money.

The lacemaker could sit still no longer. He walked to and fro with his arms folded. He could not utter a word. He, lacemaker Lekholm, had a brother who was to be a doctor! Brother to a man who was lord of life and death, a man to whom all doffed their hats in fear and reverence! Perhaps he might even become town doctor in that very town! Dr. Lekholm, lacemaker Lekholm's brother.

He stopped, put his hands into his trousers pockets and looked at his young brother. That puny little chap, as weak as a chicken, with down on his chin and pimples on his cheeks—so he was to rise to social eminence, rescue human lives from the jaws of death; wherever he went a kind of vacuum of reverence would be created around him, something majestic and exalted which could be expressed in no other way than a subdued murmur of "the doctor's coming, Dr. Lekholm's coming." . . . The lacemaker could only laugh, a laugh that was half bewilderment, half triumph. The news was too overwhelming, too unexpected for him to be able to think clearly. The only articulate words he could utter were: "The deuce!"

It was not till some time later that he added:

"We must think it over. But not a word to Augusta. Not a word. Mind that! Or, deuce take it——"

Pehr and Oscar spent the whole of Christmas-time working out calculations. A room could be got for something between 25 and 40 kronor a term. Oscar would have breakfast and supper at home. The charwoman would fetch dinner in a basket. It cost 75 öre for two—i.e. 37½ öre a head. That made about 200 kronor a term, including books. At any

rate, until Oscar had taken his bachelor's degree and had to go to Stockholm to take up duty there. The whole thing would take eight years. It was a long time, but at the end of it he would be a doctor and a man of position. And when Oscar had got so far, it would be his turn to help the lacemaker's boys, who would by then be old enough to go to the university. For they were going to be students. The deuce they were!

"But not a word to Augusta about it. Not a word till you've taken your bachelor's degree. Mind that! We must keep it dark, or she may think it'll cost too much."

Augusta, however, was informed of the state of affairs in a roundabout way. The very evening Oscar went back to Lund the lacemaker confided his secret to his tenant, the copyist Lind. As they sat and drank at the Schweden, Lekholm's heart overflowed. He took the copyist by the hand and looked into his eyes with an air of profound solemnity and importance.

"Can you keep a secret?"

The copyist pledged his honour as an official of the court of justice. How many secrets were hidden in his breast! how many things unknown to the world he had inscribed on stamped paper!

The lacemaker stretched out his neck till his unnaturally large Adam's apple looked like a second chin. He put his lips so close to the copyist's ear that his huge moustache tickled the other's face, and whispered:

"Oscar's going to be a medical student. What do you think of that? *A doctor!* The deuce! But not a word. *Not a word to a soul!* Augusta knows nothing about it. And she isn't to know anything till he's taken his bachelor's degree. She might think it'll be too expensive—now when our own little ones are beginning to come one after the other."

The copyist alluded once more to all the secrets that lay hidden in his breast. But when they had parted that same

night on the threshold, he went straight up to his rooms, woke his sister Lina and told her under promise of absolute secrecy what he had heard. He had never forgiven the lacemaker for the sanguinary encounter in which his sister had come off so badly, and he knew what a promise of secrecy meant for Lina. He was glad to have a chance of paying off old scores against the lacemaker, the conceited idiot.

And at seven the very next morning Augusta came rushing up to the workshop in the attic, where the lacemaker was. She wanted to speak to him—quite privately. But the lacemaker was no longer a man who could be talked to privately, except when he chose. Moreover, he understood in an instant what had happened.

“The devil take the copyist! Silence here! the silence of the grave! or I don’t know what I may not do.”

Augusta withdrew to her own domain, grumbling to herself. It is possible that there might have been a storm which would have compelled the lacemaker to assert his authority again by some display of violence. But a visit from the lacemaker’s father-in-law, Herr Töpfer, that very evening, had a pacifying effect. The surgeon took Lekholm’s side completely. He thought the plan an extremely wise one. The medical profession was without doubt the noblest to which a man could devote his abilities, and no sacrifices were too great when it was a question of helping a gifted lad to consecrate his life to the art of healing. If God in His wisdom had granted him, the assistant surgeon, sufficient means he himself would have chosen that career.

The lacemaker soon forgave the copyist for having blabbed. He felt, indeed, that it had been all to the good; for now that the secret had become public property without serious consequences to his domestic peace, he could talk openly of his brother’s brilliant future.

And he did so with an enthusiasm which would have wearied his acquaintances if his lack of sense of proportion

and megalomania had not given them an opportunity of "pulling his leg." He became a butt again, as he had been on account first of his heroic exploits and later of his admired Augusta. When his friends and acquaintances met him, the first question they asked was:

"Well, any news of Oscar?"

The lacemaker twirled his moustaches.

"Oscar, yes, the deuce there is! Yes, by Jove! I had a letter from him the other day. He——"

And he would start a long story. . . .

In the course of a few summer and Christmas holidays the lacemaker, by means of an inquisitiveness which Oscar found most wearisome, had completely identified himself with the academic world. He soon knew everything there was to be known about the university. Not only had he the professors of the medical faculty at his fingers' ends, but by dint of ceaseless questioning he had extended his knowledge till it embraced a large number of the lecturers and the best-known of the eccentrics who stayed up without ever taking a degree. He revelled in them—their peculiarities, their absent-mindedness, their remoteness from the world, their strange doings. None of the funny stories told over the toddy-glasses had any zest for him if their subject was not the university. Incidents in his own sphere of activity and circle of acquaintances, the adventures and pranks of travelling journeymen, had no interest for him; they belonged to a lower, insignificant world which made no appeal to him. Even in the fights which, according to Oscar, still took place between "town and gown," though on a smaller scale than in old days, he abjured his own past completely in his thoughtless enthusiasm and took the students' side with all the vehemence of his fiery nature.

"I'd like to have been there—I'd have shown them how we did it in '48. The deuce I would!"

At this time, in his own view, the lacemaker was at the

height of his power and prestige. Another factor contributed to this besides Oscar's future medical career—the origin and extension of the volunteer movement in Sweden. It was a matter of course that this movement should arouse the lace-maker's enthusiasm to a degree hitherto unwitnessed even in him. At the very first meeting of the education circle at which the question was discussed he took the floor and delivered two harangues which created a pardonable sensation, less on account of their oratorical form than of their vigour. They were more like a demonstration in bayonet fighting than anything else. As an ex-volunteer in the Slesvig war he regarded himself as marked out for a command, and was put in charge of a troop.

Sunday, instead of Saturday evening, now became the one day in the week in which he felt that he lived in the true meaning of the word. In order worthily to prepare himself for it, and for the responsibility which rested upon him, he came home from the café the evening before at an earlier hour and as a rule perfectly sober. He was up early on Sunday morning, brushed and examined his green volunteer's uniform and polished his sword. Immediately after breakfast he arrayed himself in his panoply, put on his shako, brushed up his moustaches and girded himself with his sword. He cast a last approving glance at himself in the parlour mirror and turned to his wife and children, who were watching him, with the words:

"Am I all right?"

Then he went off to the volunteers' pavilion on the outskirts of the town, where they used to parade. For several hours he commanded and shouted at his troop with an ever-growing sensation of *joi de vivre*. And this sensation swelled to positive ecstasy when, at the head of his men, he rushed forward across the little pavilion garden in a bayonet charge against the enemy, who were waiting for them behind Lagergren's garden hedge under command of Olsson the

girdler. The girdler always retreated a few steps when attacked by Lekholm. The lacemaker always rushed straight at him, and forgetting in his martial zeal that this was not Kolding, but only pretence, he used to thrust his sword at the girdler through the hawthorn hedge in a manner which the latter considered threatening and aggressive. The girdler had repeatedly remonstrated with him for his misplaced zeal, and once they had nearly come to loggerheads during the luncheon which after the exercises was always consumed in the pavilion, a luncheon with plenty of drink, including innumerable glasses of *bultis*.

During these years blessings fell like spring rain on the lacemaker's head. His wife had borne him three more sons, all of whom were to rise to distinction. He himself thought the time was not far off when he would be promoted to be lieutenant in the volunteer corps. Oscar came home in the holidays and accompanied him to the Saturday evening reunions at the Schweden, where the lacemaker made the shy, reserved lad tell stories about professors and students. And one day at the beginning of June Oscar came home as a bachelor of medicine, wearing the red-braided officers' cap of the Royal Medical Corps. *Oscar was all but an officer!* Artillerymen, police-constables, sergeants and even elderly sergeant-majors saluted him as he walked along the boulevard at the lacemaker's side.

When he came home after this triumphant walk he stopped in front of Augusta, looked her hard in the eyes and asked:

"Do you remember calling us Lekholms fools?"

Augusta protested:

"I've never called Oscar a fool."

"No, but you've called me one! Isn't Oscar my brother?"

But Augusta flung up her hands in disgust.

"Pish, I haven't the patience to listen to you! You talk such rubbish!"

During these years only one dark cloud appeared in the summer sky of his happiness. When in 1862 town councils were introduced in Sweden, he was, to his immense astonishment, passed over, although several tradesmen were elected, including the girdler Olsson, the dyer Lundgren, the tanner Hofstedt and the looking-glass-maker Säfberg. His name was not even mentioned in private discussion. That he should be thus ignored—he who had taken part in the Slesvig war, who was a prominent figure in the volunteer movement and had a brother who was practically an army surgeon!

But he consoled himself. He supposed they thought him too young. He was still under forty; and they were all elderly men except Olsson. His turn would come one day. . . .

And the sky was summer blue again.

IX

The beginning of the collapse of lacemaker Lekholm and his family may be said to date from the introduction of town councils in Sweden, although it had no connection with the development of the new communal administration. It had its origin in another event which took place at this time—his brother Oscar's departure for Stockholm to do duty at a hospital there.

Great as were the differences between the two brothers as regards both brain-power and qualities of heart, a retrospective observer of their psychologies cannot help noticing one important point of resemblance—namely, in the conditions they required for their spiritual flowering. Oscar, just like Pehr, demanded exceptional or at least spacious conditions for the full development of his latent characteristics. It had needed a war to reveal the lacemaker as the man he really

was; and now Oscar Lekholm, medical student, required a town of the size of Stockholm for the unfolding of his remarkable personality in full splendour.

It seemed to be clothes which were the decisive factor. Even in the relatively peaceful panoply of a volunteer the lacemaker had terrified girdler Olsson by his manifestations of bloodthirstiness. Something similar happened in Oscar's case. The mere act of putting on the tall hat with which a medical student, in those days, used to crown his head on arriving in the capital had awakened in him dreams of whose existence the lacemaker at least had till now been completely ignorant. Or it would perhaps be more correct to say that as the placing of sword or rifle in the lacemaker's hand had turned his heroic dreams to realities, so Oscar, by virtue of the tall hat, was able to fulfil the desire he had till now concealed behind a façade of reticence and shyness—the longing for a merry life amid clinking glasses and intoxicating music.

This metamorphosis of Oscar from a quiet, reticent, almost boorish Lund student to a full-fledged young aristocrat about town came as a complete surprise to the lacemaker—when it finally did come in the form of a series of crashes.

If he had been as keen-sighted in the matter of human weaknesses as in hitting the bull's-eye on a target—he was a remarkably good shot—he would probably already have noticed one or two circumstances which might have given him food for thought. Oscar's studies had cost considerably more than had originally been calculated; the time allotted had also proved to be insufficient. But it was not till Oscar had moved to Stockholm that the lacemaker began to be seriously anxious. As, unfortunately, is only too usual in such cases, it was possible for the metamorphosis to be hidden from the person mainly concerned until it had been for several years a melancholy, incontrovertible fact. Like

a star shining in space, happiness often continues to send its light to men long after it has ceased to exist. It can, too, sometimes warm a human heart long after its source has ceased to be life-giving. For another year the lacemaker could go about singing his younger brother's praises, and his brother could pay a few isolated and very brief visits to his native town in the summer on his way to or from duty. And then there was joy and feasting in the Lekholms' house or at the Schweden.

So little idea had the lacemaker of the reality that hung over his little head like a sword of Damocles on a thread that grew ever thinner, that he even declared to all and sundry that Stockholm had "made a man of Oscar." He had developed in every way, both bodily and mentally; he had become fat and round, had grown a moustache and wore a tall hat even on visits to his native town. He had also developed hitherto undreamed-of social gifts. What speeches he could make, what stories he could tell! He showed himself the master of a rich and varied instrument. He could strike a serious note, relate incidents from the behind-the-scenes of politics, describe August Blanche's appearance when he made his great speech, and much else of the kind. The merry and the serious-minded found equal pleasure in listening to him.

The lacemaker used to sit leaning back in his chair with a cigar in his right hand and his left fist on his left thigh like a field-marshal on horseback, and look round at his companions as they listened eagerly and proved by their silence, or by a sudden burst of laughter, what a marvellous doctor Oscar would be in time. He could hold his audience fascinated for a whole evening, now with his jokes, now with a survey of historic events in the capital; and then, before they broke up, came the great moment. Oscar tapped on his glass and announced that he wished to say a few words which came from the depths of his heart. He wished here,

among Pehr's comrades, publicly to thank his elder brother and foster-father for all that he had been to him. He pointed out that his brother had shown no less generosity of heart in time of peace than in the hour of danger and amid the tumult of battle. In the Slesvig war he had been ready to sacrifice, if need be, his life for a brother nation, now he sacrificed his savings for a brother in the flesh. But he would not have made that sacrifice for nothing. He, Oscar, would see to that. It all sounded so beautiful that the lacemaker had to take his flowered handkerchief from his tail-coat pocket and wipe away a tear or two. It was wonderful to hear Oscar talk like that.

But it was always rather tiresome afterwards, when the guests had all gone and Augusta had put out the lamp that hung from the parlour ceiling and retired to the bedroom. The two brothers were left alone. And then Oscar used to say:

"By the way, I wanted to have a little business talk with you, Pehr."

These words filled the lacemaker with consternation—not that he was mean, but because he desired to keep his emotional mood untroubled by all mundane considerations as long as possible.

"Won't it wait till to-morrow?"

But Oscar could not wait. He always had to leave next day. And he did not want to interfere with his brother's work. That was one of his principles—never to disturb people at their work.

So they had their business talk.

"It's a lot of money," said the lacemaker.

H'm, it might seem a lot of money. But the lacemaker did not understand these things. A medical student who would soon be a doctor could not possibly live like a student of theology. He must show himself in society, make friends and gain confidence, for a man never knew where he might

not find himself when he had finished his training. And one of these old friends might make a great deal of difference to his future when he applied for a post as town doctor or in a hospital. Some big bug in the town might say: "Oh, yes, Lekholm, I know him. We'll take him." But the lacemaker did not understand these things.

The suggestion that the lacemaker did not understand anything was the most effective method of immediately receiving his support. Then he understood in a moment. No one should think him the fool Augusta saw in him. He twirled his moustaches and wrinkled his brow.

"Deuce take it, *not understand?* I don't see anything so difficult to understand in that!"

"Besides," Oscar added, "what are a few thousand kronor more or less to a doctor when he's once started?"

When the little transaction was over and the lacemaker joined his wife, Augusta sometimes gave him a timid, questioning look.

"How much did he want?"

The larger the sum had been, the more emphatically did the lacemaker reply:

"I'll have silence here! The silence of the grave! You mind your own business, and I'll mind mine!"

For some days after Oscar's visit the lacemaker could not get rid of the thought that it had been a great deal of money. But his good nature and quickness to forget soon came to his help. His friends' eulogies helped too. They clapped him on the back and said:

"A devil of a fellow, Oscar! A fellow with such humour and such a power of expressing himself has only to open his mouth to frighten death from the door. Who'd have thought it of him?"

"Thought it of him? Why not? Did anyone believe what I'd done at Kolding, when I came back from the war?"

After Oscar had been two years in Stockholm the first bolt came. And it came from a still comparatively cloudless sky.

What had happened was this. Oscar had, as a good comrade should, backed bills for a friend. Not that there was anything new in that; all medical students did it—the Handelsbank, which had a professor of medicine on its board, accepted their bills readily. Nor did the banks lose anything. But this time the comrade whom Oscar had guaranteed had got into serious trouble and could not meet the bill. He had bolted. It must be said on his behalf that love and passion had a hand in the game; Oscar's comrade had fallen desperately in love with a beautiful soubrette. But for this passion there would have been no danger; for Oscar, with the thorough knowledge he possessed of his comrade's sterling character, could swear that he was at bottom an honourable man—yes, the most honourable man who had ever pressed the hand of another. But where human passions are concerned the dictates of honour often have to come second. So not one hard word of this friend, who, his future destroyed, would all his life bitterly regret the devouring flame the soubrette had kindled in his breast.

But now his affairs must be cleared up. Otherwise he, Oscar, and several of his friends would "go smash." And much more than that: the Stockholm banks' confidence in medical students would receive so severe a blow that he and his comrades had grave fears lest medical students' bills should be refused for several years to come. The reputation of a whole students' corps was at stake. It was, in other words, the duty of every medical student to do his utmost to preserve its honour and credit. He, Oscar, was involved in this unhappy affair to the extent of 5,000 kronor. This sum must be obtained at all costs, and quickly.

It was certainly not the first time in the history of the world that such appeals, thanks to the (in such cases) un-

failing accuracy of the postal service, have reached their destination. Archæologists' excavations in Egypt prove that papyrus rolls of a practically identical nature were sent, four hundred years before the birth of Christ, by needy students at Alexandria University to their worthy fathers, tilling in the sweat of their brows the fertile but stubborn land of the Nile delta. But to the lacemaker the news his younger brother sent him was something absolutely new, something entirely undreamt of. That letter made so profound an impression on him that he used, several decades after, to describe to his grandsons its effect on his feelings and thoughts—by way of warning from an old and experienced man to a lad about to go to the university.

According to his own account, the lacemaker had been utterly at a loss. He had, at least, understood clearly from the start that the disaster must in all circumstances be concealed from Augusta. For a time he considered turning to some outside person for advice in his sore need. The first person he thought of was naturally the copyist Lind, partly because he was his nearest neighbour, partly because he was comparatively well educated. But his second thought was not to do so; Augusta would have been told the story in a couple of hours by Mamsell Lind. And that must be prevented at all costs.

He thought for a moment, too, of Dr. Browallius. But both pride and fear prevented him. He would not let any outsider know what was happening to Oscar and his studies. He had bragged about him so much in the past that he could not now expose both Oscar and himself to the sneers of the envious and spiteful. And he was afraid too—afraid that another university man might tell him the whole truth about Oscar and his behaviour. For despite Oscar's constant references to his inability to understand academic conditions, he saw fully and clearly that something was wrong. But to

He never hesitated a moment, of course, as to whether he should help his young brother or not. The prestige of a whole students' corps was clearly at stake, and of the corps which he regarded as the finest of all, that which had the last word in the fight between sickness and health, between life and death. And Oscar would completely misjudge his brother if he thought that, in such a case, he would ignore the first call of duty and humanity.

The lacemaker raised the money on the security of his freehold house in Östra Storgatan. At his father's death the property had been valued at something over 6,000 riksdaler, but it was worth more even then; and its value had further increased with the passage of years.

Grandpapa Lekholm used to tell his grandsons who were going to the university—also as a warning—what a perfect hell the following years had been. Nor had anyone who knew his wife any reason to doubt the truth of his words. For one thing, the blow in question was not the only one of its kind. It was followed by others, delivered with the superior, easy confidence of the man of the world. For another, the time soon came when the lacemaker simply *could* not say no to Oscar's demands. He had already pledged the greater part of what once had been his property. There was no alternative but to go on staking more and more in the hope, which became more uncertain every year, that Oscar would at last take his final degree.

And the worst part of it was that he never had a chance now of discussing matters with his young brother. Oscar never came home now. He had so much to do. He had his work to do; he was sent off to do duty as provincial doctor, as town doctor, as surgeon to a battalion. There was no answer to this; these turns of duty brought in income—for example, at Smedjebacken one summer Oscar had earned two thousand riksdaler in two months. This was all to the good; above all, it proved the accuracy of Oscar's

contention that when he was once in practice a thousand-kronor note one way or the other would make no difference. But what the lacemaker could not understand was that Oscar, despite these profitable duties, asked for more money than ever.

Even harder to bear than the impossibility of having speech of his younger brother was the persistency with which Augusta endeavoured to discuss the matter with him, Lekholm.

Augusta certainly knew her place in the scheme of things as a wife; she had sworn before God and men to obey Lekholm, and he had himself, with all emphasis, reminded her of the duties she had undertaken. But she was also a mother. Did he give no thought to his own children, who were now growing up? Were they to have any education? Or was it only his usual fine talk, when he went about boasting that his boys were to be students, every one of them, all four? What sort of education would they get if all the money went to that young cuckoo, that odious dandy, who was too proud to show himself at home? How much money had Lekholm actually lent him? And when did he mean to take his examination? Would it not be much better to take his examination than to go on doing these turns of special duty?

Day after day Augusta asked him these disagreeable questions. And she always ended with the warning:

"You say I'm to mind my business, and you'll mind yours. Look after yours, I shan't interfere in it. But Heaven help you, Lekholm! Whatever you do, think of your children!"

Lekholm twirled his moustache.

"Deuce take it, Augusta, hold your tongue! Or I don't know what I may not do!"

"I will hold my tongue. I won't say another word. But

there's just one thing I'd like to know. What's your own boys' future to be?"

The lacemaker tried to smile.

"Bright! very bright!"

Augusta looked him up and down.

"You're a fool, Lekholm. That's what you are and always will be, to your dying day. Mark my words!"

The lacemaker thumped the table with his fist.

"Didn't you hear what I said? Hold your tongue! Not another word about Oscar!"

But the clenched fist and the command lacked their old strength. His hard-won grip of the family reins had begun visibly to loosen. The fact was that the lacemaker was not only good-natured, hard-working and on the whole punctilious in the discharge of his duties to his fellow-creatures. He was also an extremely just man. And, at the juncture to which affairs had come, he fully realized that Augusta's persistent questions were more than justified. He was indeed risking his children's future. He saw that more clearly every day. He had till now been too absorbed in Oscar and his future greatness fully to grasp the consequences if all his plans for his younger brother came to shipwreck. Moreover, till now his children had been so young that he had had no occasion to think of their future in any but the vaguest manner—as something very bright and prosperous, with the blue Lund students' cap as the glorious crown of their youth.

Now, when Oscar's brilliant future was in danger, the lacemaker made a singular discovery; all these years, in the inmost recesses of his heart's workshop, he had been weaving rosy dreams of his boys' future which now suddenly revealed themselves as finished articles. Only now did he fully realize how definitely their futures had shaped themselves in his mind. They were to be leading men in the town, like Oscar

—doctors, judges or mayors. When, in his old age, he took his Sunday afternoon walk, a well-to-do citizen and town councillor, he would be greeted with special respect as father of a town doctor, a judge and a mayor. The haloes that surrounded the boys' heads would shine round his own white hairs too, and form a triple crown unique in all Sweden; there was in the whole kingdom no such lacemaker as he.

He had never tried to find out whether the boys really had the ability to make these dreams come true. He had unconsciously set a standard for himself and his children. He felt that it would be a setback, a retreat, a humiliation, if the boys were deprived of the possibility of going to the university and had to go into a workshop like himself, or behind the counter of a grocer's shop. The whole idea of the Lekholm family was linked in his mind with a longing to rise, a struggle to reach a higher social sphere: and the failure of these plans would mean to him the abandonment of an ideal.

It was for this reason that his gestures and speech lacked their old compelling power when he thumped the table and commanded silence.

Augusta, with her feminine acuteness, detected the difference in the ring of the words. And without fear that Lekholm "might not know what he was doing," she repeated:

"You're a fool, Lekholm. That's what you are."

X

Years passed.

It looked as if Oscar would never have finished his training. The autumn in which it was fifteen years since his matriculation, the lacemaker sought counsel of the town

doctor. What did he think about Oscar? Fifteen years! But the doctor maintained that there was nothing unusual about it, when a man was away on duty for a long time on end and his reading was interrupted. There was no actual cause for uneasiness. That was the lacemaker's opinion also. But he was beginning to grow rather tired of all these questions from friends and acquaintances: "Well, how's Oscar getting on? When will he have finished? Won't it be time soon?" The doctor declared that there was nothing to worry about. People could say what they liked. Envy and malice were the hereditary sins of mankind. The only thing to do was to say nothing, put up with it and see what time would bring. "You ought to take plenty of baths, get into a thorough perspiration, cleanse your system and get drunk now and again, when you're not feeling up to the mark. And above all, wait and see what time brings. That's the most important thing."

And the lacemaker promised to wait on events. But it was not as easy as it sounded. He simply did not dare think of the future. He did not think so much of the money he had already spent on Oscar's studies. This was by now all he possessed. The house was mortgaged up to the chimneys. He had even begun to touch the money Augusta had inherited from the old surgeon. He must go on helping Oscar! Oscar *must* become a doctor and pay back what he owed! Otherwise Augusta would be right when she said that he had destroyed his own children's future for a young cuckoo's sake. And the children were beginning to grow up now, one after another. The time would soon have come when a decision would have to be made regarding their future. The boys must go to the university; that he had promised himself, Augusta and them.

The eldest, Per, was now sixteen. The lacemaker had never been able really to make him out. Charlotte, too, his twin, was a peculiar child, although easier to understand.

She was very musical, and when she was only five used to climb up on to the music-stool and play by ear. Moreover, she was of the female sex, and could not cause her father anxiety for the future beyond the possibility of her never marrying.

It was otherwise with Per. Not only because he was a boy, but also because of his singularity. In appearance he was a typical Töpfer, like his twin sister. His figure, nose and chin all came from the Töpfers. But his affinity to the old surgeon was not confined to external characteristics. As the eldest male grandchild, old Töpfer had made him his favourite from the beginning. When Per was only three years old, the old man used, in spring and summer, to take him out for little walks on the boulevard, sit on a bench in the sun with the little boy on his knee and discourse to him on life and its diverse manifestations. As a child of five or six he was more in his grandfather's house than at home with the Lekholms. Often, indeed, he stayed there for a long time, sleeping at night in the old man's bed, till Augusta, seized with maternal jealousy, came to fetch him and made him stay at home for a few days. At the end of that time the old Swedenborgian surgeon would appear and ask if he might "borrow" the little boy for the day, the result of which was that the "loan" was not repaid and Augusta had to collect it in person. What the two did in the three low, dark, small-windowed rooms over the barber's shop the lacemaker could never discover. When he asked his father-in-law what he thought of the boy, the surgeon answered:

"I consider him a remarkably godly child."

"But do you think he's got brains?"

The surgeon gave his foolish son-in-law a look over his spectacles, full of comprehension and humour.

"The godly don't need brains."

The lacemaker scratched his head.

"Yes, but what do you *think*?"

"I don't think. I know. I know that the Lord Jesus was only a carpenter's son."

His son-in-law was shrewd enough to draw the intended conclusion from these words, at once simple and mysterious. Per was a lacemaker's son. But the conclusion did not satisfy him. He did not want Per to be the founder of a religion. The uncertainty of such a career found no place in his dreams of the future. He wanted to know whether his father-in-law thought the boy would become a doctor or a judge or a mayor. And he therefore extracted from the old man's enigmatic words the answer he desired: Per should be a lawyer—possibly influenced by the cant phrase which attaches to justice the epithet "divine."

Per went to a primary school, and did his home work at his grandfather's. And as the Lekholm abode was gradually filled with younger brothers the dark little rooms over the barber's shop became his home.

To the lacemaker's astonishment, however, Per did not prove the genius the surgeon's prophecy had led him to expect. His reports were of average quality, perhaps rather below than above. The lacemaker, who as brother to a student felt that he could approach the masters without seeming presumptuous, sometimes asked them what they thought of his son Per. Their answers showed more surprise at the question being asked at all than at the way it was put. None of them had a word to say against the boy.

"You see, the fact is," the lacemaker used to add, "that I think of making him read law later on."

The schoolmasters' bewilderment grew greater than ever and found concentrated expression in a curt, surprised "Oh!"

Per was thirteen when his grandfather closed his introspective eyes for ever. The boy had to go home to the now mortgaged house in Östra Storgatan. But he never assimilated himself to the *milieu*, could take no real part in the

—thanks to his mother—stern and rigid family life. He went about alone, as shut-up as an oyster, had no playmates, visited his grandfather's grave daily, and kept such things as he might be brooding over rigidly secret. At school he was still among the mediocrities.

The lacemaker used to complain to Augusta, with a sort of bitter triumph in his voice:

"We shall never make anything of Per. He's got no head for bookwork. He can never go to the university. He's a regular Töpfer through and through."

But Augusta had her answer ready.

"Well, none of your boys'll be able to go to the university, if we've got to go on keeping that Oscar."

The lacemaker thumped the table with his fist.

"Hold your tongue, I tell you. Not a word about Oscar. Not one word. Or I don't know what I may not do."

And he used to slouch away. His threats were but empty words. What would he do with the other three boys if Oscar did not begin to practise soon and begin repaying him? There was no need to worry about Per. He must be what he would and could be; he must be apprenticed, or put behind a counter and turned into a shopkeeper. The lacemaker could thank his lucky stars that he and not the second boy, Carl, was the eldest. Carl was a real Lekholm, in mind if not in body—for in appearance he was a Töpfer. He had brains. His gift for mathematics had already attracted his teachers' attention. The old mathematical master had more than once stopped the lacemaker in the street and said:

"Your boy Carl will go far. He's got the makings of a professor in him."

Carl was now in the lower sixth. Oscar had still three years in which to finish his training. He must start repaying the money in three years. Otherwise the lacemaker must plead failure.

When Carl had got his remove to the upper sixth, and

Oscar, despite constant exhortations by letter, had not yet taken his examination and time after time had decisively but politely refused his brother's invitation to come home so that they could discuss the matter seriously, the lacemaker decided to pay a visit to Stockholm and see for himself what was happening.

This visit became celebrated in the annals of the Lekholm family. The lacemaker came home with a cashmere shawl for his wife and a receipt for a piano which was to come by water from Stockholm. She had talked about this shawl and piano for years. A cashmere shawl was in those days a mark of social position. One master craftsman's wife after another had received one from her husband. But Lekholm had never been able to afford to confer such a mark of distinction on his wife. And as for the piano, she declared that it was his duty to get a new one; fancy her and Charlotte, with their musical talent, having to sit and hammer away at an ancient instrument she had brought with her from her father's house, just that every penny might go to an idle young loafer who never took an examination!

On the lacemaker's return, however, she got both shawl and piano.

It was not till several months later that the awful truth was revealed. The lacemaker had certainly met Oscar. But the money with which he had bought the presents for his wife he had not received from Oscar, but had borrowed from his old friend and fellow-journeyman, master-lacemaker Schulte in Götgatan. When he had learnt the truth about his brother, whom he had met in a tavern in Trebackarlånggatan; when he had no doubt left, not only that he had gone to the bad, but that he would never in his life become a doctor or anything else of any use in the world, his first thought had been to go and drown himself in Strömmen. He felt that he had no other choice. His whole life was ruined. All that he had and owned, and more, had

gone the way of all things mortal. Oscar had cost him over 20,000 riksdaler. Twenty thousand riksdaler *putz weg*, as his German father-in-law used to say when he had shaved a client or cut his corns—20,000 riksdaler clean gone!

His brother would never be a doctor. His boys would never be students. And what would become of himself he did not know. The only thing of which he was fully and firmly convinced was that he would never know another happy moment. Every day for the rest of his life Augusta would be at him. "You're a fool, Lekholm, an utter fool!" Year in and year out he would have to listen to this, without being able to utter a word in reply, *because she was right*. He *was* a fool! He had *always* been a fool. Augusta's eternal wrath—that was the only thing that waited him. Better Strömmen. . . .

Then he had had an idea—Schulte in Götgatan. They had been fellow-journeymen in their careless youth. Lekholm had worked for a year with old Schulte, the present master's father. He had been like a son of the house. He would go and talk to him first. He needed someone in whom he could confide, to whom he could lighten his heart, just for once reveal his terrible secret.

But that came to nothing either. Schulte and his whole household received him like a twin brother, with open arms and the most liberal hospitality. He had had to move to Schulte's. It was out of the question that Pehr Lekholm should stay at a hotel, so long as the firm of Schulte existed in Götgatan. There was a few days' drinking at home and abroad, in the houses of a few other master-lacemakers and at restaurants. The lacemaker never managed to say what was on his mind. It was out of place among solid Stockholm citizens and members of his own guild, who had no idea that Lekholm was not rolling in money, seeing that he had a contract with his Majesty and the State.

Perhaps Pehr Anders himself was infected by his fellow-

craftsmen's air of prosperity, persuaded himself that he was not yet ruined, that perhaps his younger brother would after all take his examination before it was too late. Perhaps he even sat amongst his old friends and, in that hour of ruin and despair, bragged about himself and his possessions, of his earnings, of his freehold house, of his boys who were going to be students and Oscar who would soon be a doctor. It may also be presumed that he said something about his thinking of buying a cashmere shawl and a new piano for his wife, but not having brought enough ready money with him. The fact is that, as has been said, instead of throwing himself into Strömmen he came home with the shawl and the receipt for the piano and declared that there was no danger whatever as far as Oscar was concerned. He was getting on well and would take his final examination soon.

How he had imagined that he could conceal the real state of affairs for ever it is hard to say. In all probability he did not think at all of any remote future. He doubtless lived as most others do in a position like his—for the next day, the next week, in some kind of vague hope of everything coming right in the end. That during the months which followed, that is to say, the whole of the autumn, he was profoundly miserable, a prey to constant fear and qualms of conscience, is clear not only from his own subsequent admissions but also from his wife's testimony. She had noticed all that autumn that he perspired fearfully at night, that he lay and tossed in the bed as though on a gridiron, and constantly got up, went out of the room, and was absent for a long time. He had explained these departures by pleading indigestion.

One thing is certain—that he tried to improve his position by gambling in the Hamburg lottery.

As things happened, however, the lacemaker did not have to wait long for the day when he would be compelled to

admit failure. The true state of affairs was revealed in a very simple and unexpected manner.

One morning, just before Christmas, the quartermaster of the regiment sent a message saying that he wished to speak to the lacemaker.

Lekholm knew what it was about—the contract for the regiment. He had expected the quartermaster to send for him any day. The whole thing was a matter of form and would be disposed of in the twinkling of an eye. He had only to put on his Sunday coat and go up and bow to the quartermaster, who said:

“Yes, we have opened the tenders. You will get the contract.”

And then they signed a paper.

So this time, as he had done for so many years, the lacemaker climbed down from his loom, washed and shaved, took his Spanish cane with the ivory dog’s head, went off to headquarters, entered the regimental office, bowed to Quartermaster Berghoff and nodded to Sergeant-Major Sundberg, who sat at the desk opposite.

Yes, it was about the contract he had been sent for. And the fact was, that he could not have it for the next year. A lacemaking firm at Malmö, Albert Svensson, had made a considerably lower offer. He had had the contracts for the Crown Prince’s Hussars and the Skåne Hussars for several years, and now he evidently meant to have this one too. He could do it much cheaper.

It was then that the lacemaker fainted. He was just going to take out his glasses, which were in the top upper pocket of his black velveteen waistcoat, to look at the tender of the Svensson firm, which the quartermaster had just laid before him. But just as he was about to put his glasses on his hook nose, he tottered and fell to the floor like a log. The quartermaster and Sergeant-Major Sundberg lifted him up and carried him to the long sofa under the portrait of General

Cardell. The orderly dashed forward with a jug and poured water over him.

When he came to, the quartermaster tried to console him. He had not lost the contract for ever; he could come back another year with a lower tender, and all would be well again. Besides, the contract did not mean everything to him, who had a big stone house and, people said, money in the bank and a brother who would soon be a doctor.

The lacemaker had risen to a sitting position on the sofa, with water running over his face and down on to his tail coat, velveteen waistcoat and trousers. He gazed up at the quartermaster with a look in his eyes which Sergeant-Major Sundberg declared that he would never forget as long as he lived.

"I'm ruined, captain," he said.

The captain turned to Sergeant-Major Sundberg and said in a voice full of emotion:

"Poor devil!"

XI

When the lacemaker left the regimental office a quarter of an hour later, he was a broken man. With his still wet hair sticking to his forehead, his once so martial moustaches hanging like a walrus's tusks, and large damp patches on his trousers, the usually trim little man set out upon his terrible walk home to render account of his stewardship.

The hero of the battle of Kolding and the fight at the front-door, once so terrible in his fury, was like a child who has dirtied his clothes in the cruel child's-play of life, and whose only thought is to run home in a panic and complain how rough the game has been and with what shocking injustice he has been treated. Sometimes, in after years, the lacemaker used to express regret that, instead of going home to his wife, he had not jumped straight into the river or

crept up to the attic and hanged himself by a rope from a rafter. But perhaps he hoped for a little kindness and forgiveness from his wife on the ground of the monstrous injustice that had been done him. It is even possible that during the five minutes' walk from regimental headquarters to the house he still owned in name, he was so filled with the news importance of the appalling catastrophe that his naïve, communicative temperament was animated by one instinct only—to rush home as fast as his legs would carry him and tell the story. "Can you imagine what has happened? They've taken the contract away from me—from me, who have had it for all these years, and my father before me. And they've gone and given it to a fellow called Svensson, at Malmö, whom I never heard of in my life."

And when he had confessed everything once for all, and rendered account, he could hardly have expected any other reception than he got. Even in her old age Augusta's heart was a cauldron of seething poisons. Even twenty years later her thin, shrivelled lips, at moments when the bitterness of her humiliation made her heart boil over, could open again like sluices to release a torrent of hate and contempt of the liar and cheat who had flung her and her children into poverty, the miserable creature who for so many years had frightened her into silence and submission with his play-acting, his big talk and violent gestures. "Silence," he had thundered, the empty braggart, "I'll have silence here—the silence of the grave!" And she had been deceived and taken him for a man—him, the mountebank and fool! . . .

XII

Immediately after the fearful confession Fru Lekholm took over the direction of affairs. She adopted the methods women generally employ when the home has to be saved from ruin;

organized economy, retrenchment, cutting-down. The bank took over the house, and the family crowded into a smaller one, a little, low wooden house of one story in Östra Bulevarden, whose only merit was that it had an attic long enough to be used for spinning.

The journeymen and apprentices were turned off; work would now have to be confined to the making of lace, trimmings and braid for drawing-room chairs, sofas, *portières* and coffins—all the trumpery little work the lacemaker had previously undertaken only to accommodate the dignitaries of the town and old customers. Augusta herself helped in the work up in the attic; Charlotte had to look after the shop and give piano lessons at twelve skilling an hour; meat was served only twice a week, and the sweet was cut out of the Sunday dinner. Fru Lekholm also, of course, took charge of the finances, kept the books herself and guarded them like a dragon; Lekholm might not even look at them. He received only twelve skilling a week for tobacco.

The lacemaker bowed submissively to her tyranny. In his old age, on the occasions when the sluices of Augusta's wrath were reopened, he could plead in his defence that the family's humiliation was not really his fault, but hers. If he had only had time to recover his strength after the fearful blow he would have entered into competition with the Malmö firm the next year and they would have been well off again. He could have borrowed money from friends and acquaintances to pay the interest during the lean year, and thus he could have got on his feet again.

But this defence was nothing but the cloak of mercy which Providence wraps about those who cannot endure the burning rays of the truth. Even if he had been a man of much greater financial ability than he was, he would not have been able to improve his position. In his old age he had forgotten something of which his wife was able to remind him; he would never have been able to borrow an

öre. The reason was not merely that, as Augusta expressed it, no one on earth would have had any confidence in a fool, a vain idiot, who was stupid enough to invest his own and other people's money (she meant her own inheritance) in a rake's dissipation. He seemed to have forgotten that the time of the disaster was the beginning of the seventies, when the great economic crisis and time of scarcity were just setting in. Did he not remember that the rate of interest had risen to six per cent.? Had he forgotten that even the State Bank would not lend money even against Government securities? Did he not remember how everyone hid his coins as if they had been gold, which, for that matter, they were. If he had forgotten, she remembered it, and would remember it as long as there was life in her body. For she had more than once discussed the matter with Major Rosenstjerna and the judge, Herr Nolleroth, when they met to play their quartettes. They had told her how one big company after another which had been formed in recent years had had to close down. They had even explained to her what the cause of all this misery was; it was, they said, the consequence of the Franco-German war.

Seen from a loftier viewpoint—that of Major Rosenstjerna and Herr Nolleroth—it might, therefore, be said that the lacemaker, who had once emerged as a hero from a war against Germany, had now received his mortal wound in combat with that swiftly advancing Great Power.

Whether his own reflections were strong-winged enough to rise to such heights must be left unsaid. But one thing is certain—that in his old age his hatred of Germany increased year by year. As he sat in his armchair by the window, contemplating in the little mirror the life of the street and the boulevard beyond, he was often heard to mumble:

“Germany's the curse of the world.”

But these words might equally well be interpreted as a

sly dig at Fru Lekholm, who was, of course, German on her father's side. At any rate, that was how she understood them.

But even if the world situation had been otherwise at the time of the Lekholm disaster, it is hardly likely that the lacemaker would have been able to recover his lost position. He was already about fifty, and his life hitherto had hardly given proof of the stubbornness and astuteness called for in a competition which was just then beginning to make new demands, more exacting than in the past, on a man's mental and physical equipment.

Faced with the "struggle for life" which set in at the beginning of the seventies, master-lacemaker Pehr Anders Lekholm laid down his arms unbidden. Even in her old age, his wife used to complain of the absolutely incurable slackness which, after the catastrophe, spread like a consumption through his organism. "One had to go on at him from morning till night to get the least little thing done," she used to say.

Ruin and humiliation—that was the atmosphere the lacemaker breathed from now onward. All that he had lived for in the days of his strength and prosperity—the dream of seeing his boys with university degrees, men of mark—had been buried under the ruins of his career. It was too late now to spit on his hands and take a fresh grip. Nor could anything be expected of Oscar. He went about Stockholm, a broken-down student; it was even affirmed that he begged in the streets, till one of his fellow-students somehow or other secured him a post on a newspaper in a small town, where he lived on for a few years as a bohemian, raconteur and frequenter of cafés. Till one day he fell ill with inflammation of the lungs and died.

The lacemaker's boys had to fend for themselves. Per had been apprenticed to a joiner before the catastrophe.

And the three younger boys—Carl, a Lekholm in intellect, a real mathematical genius; Anders, who had inherited his mother's musical talent and the Lekholms' good brains; and Fredrik, who was still too young for the lion's claws to have appeared—they must be what they would or could be, tradesmen, shop assistants, anything. . . . One thing was as good as another. It was all the same to him. The main thing was that they should go out into the world as quickly as possible. For it was close quarters in the little wooden house in Östra Bulevarden—only two rooms and a kitchen.

Carl, the mathematical genius, left his home in a rage and went to sea. It was his intention to study and eventually secure a master's certificate. But in a year he was back again; he was too poor a sailor. And so the dreadful thing happened, which, so to speak, set the crown on the Lekholm family's social collapse; this Carl, of whom the lacemaker had hoped so much, enlisted in the artillery as a common gunner.

This was the final mark of the family's social collapse. So low had it sunk, and with such giddy rapidity, that only a few years after the lacemaker had possessed a brother holding the rank of lieutenant in the medical corps, he had a son an ordinary recruit. He who had once dreamed of sauntering along the streets flanked by his four sons, the judge, the doctor, the mayor, and whatever Fredrik was going to be, would now, if he had been willing to show himself out of doors in their company, have walked between a journeyman carpenter and a gunner. . . .

Humiliation and social collapse—that was all he had to expect during the rest of his life, which he hoped God in His wisdom would make as brief as possible for the poor henpecked husband that he, the hero of Kolding, now owned to himself that he had been.

His was indeed a monotonous life. And Augusta did what

was in her power to make him taste hell before his time. But it was hardly this foretaste which made him a God-fearing, church-going man in his old age. His piety was due rather to his gregariousness. The catastrophe had deprived him of all intercourse with his fellow-men in the form and the atmosphere in which he had previously enjoyed it, amid the smell of beefsteak and the vapour of steaming toddies. His straitened economic position and Augusta's dragon's claws round his purse cut him off from all such cheerful reunions and festivities. Nor, perhaps, during the first years would he have cared to make a public display of his and his family's humiliation.

He became a lonely man. And for anyone with his conspicuous fondness for his fellow-creatures and sociability this must have been the heaviest part of his punishment. And there was only one alleviation of it—going to church. In church a man in his position could press against his fellow-creatures, feel their elbows touching his own, inhale the odour of their bodies when entering and leaving, and exchange with them the words his soul yearned for. Going to church was even becoming to a man who had been struck down by misfortune as he had been.

Hunched up on his bench, free from Augusta's scolding, at once alone and in company, he could sink into himself and reflect on the strange measure which had been meted out to him for having followed one of the most beautiful injunctions of Scripture—to love his neighbour as himself. He had obeyed that commandment in regard to his younger brother. His obedience to the commandment had certainly made him an unhappy, broken man. But his misfortune, his crushing blow, were only a test from the Almighty. Some day the hour of justification would strike, the day when the words would become reality:

“The last shall be first, and the first last.”

XIII

The fall of the Lekholm family left behind it no traces whatever except in the minds of its own members. Not even in a little town of five or six thousand inhabitants could it occupy the thoughts and tongues of the community for any length of time. The lacemaker was most missed at the gatherings he had never failed to attend in the days of his prosperity. His absence deprived them to no small extent of the element of humour they had contained.

The rôle of butt and fool in social life is none too easy to fill. To play it with brilliance and zest quite special qualities are demanded of the actor, not, perhaps, so uncommon as single characteristics, but very rarely met with in the well-balanced combination required to make a first-class butt. There was no one else in his circle, either among the craftsmen, the tradesmen, or the volunteers, who combined in his personality the lacemaker's naïve enthusiasm, his abnormal vanity, his explosive irritability, his sensitiveness to insults to his dignity, and his peculiar imagination, which identified the events in which he had taken part with his own small person.

And so he was missed. And this, as in so many other cases, led to a revised estimate of his personal worth. Now that he was no longer there, and was seen only through the rosy mist of the past, the ridicule of which he had been the object was transformed into a personal quality of his own. He was remembered, and all the more so as time passed, as a humorist of a peculiar type. There had always been jokes and laughter in his company. Therefore he himself must have been by nature a cheery fellow, a funny dog, a comic turn, whose little face, with its hook nose and big moustaches, radiated humour. Younger generations of craftsmen and merchants heard his own contemporaries talk of entertain-

ments and gatherings in the days when old Lekholm was in his prime as a time of unforgettable enjoyment, side-splitting fun and ringing peals of laughter.

All the episodes relating to these convivial meetings, all the jokes which lay outside the bounds of personal experience, were described as having taken place in Lekholm's prime. The twenty odd times when he, rather unsteady on his feet, had been accompanied home to his wife by a few jokers, were magnified to great processions headed by the bold lacemaker, swinging his Spanish cane as he advanced to the attack on "that damned cat, his old woman." A remark he had made one evening to one of his boon companions at the Schweden, "If I hadn't got Augusta for my wife I'd have got peace instead," became a proverb— "Peace," said Lekholm, and went home to his wife." The proverb was quoted in those days far beyond the limits of the town itself when the advantages and disadvantages of marriage were being discussed among men.

But even the lacemaker was to have his hour of justification. It came when he was about seventy.

One day at the beginning of October his Majesty King Oscar II, with his sons Gustav and Carl, was to pay a visit to the town. The station buildings were adorned with the king's monogram, surmounted by a crown, and hung with wreaths. Avenues of flags had been put up along the main streets. On the platform were waiting the governor of the province, the president of the court of justice and the rest of the court personnel, the regimental commander and the officers of the garrison. Outside a battery was drawn up with limbered guns, farther off the children of the various schools formed a double rank, and beyond them, in the direction of the market-place, the citizens were assembled many deep along the route.

It was a brilliant autumn day, real king's weather, with sunshine, a touch of cold, and just enough wind to catch the

flags and blow out their crosses to greet the exalted visitors.

Dr. Charles Holmes, or Kalle Lekholm as he then was, who was in the fifth form of the elementary school, was standing drawn up along with his comrades when he suddenly received a violent nudge from his neighbour.

"Look, Kalle, look, Kalle, here comes your grandfather! What on earth's that uniform he's got on?"

Kalle Lekholm looked . . . and a second later he went scarlet in the face for shame, his knees grew weak under him, and he felt himself shrinking like a toy balloon. For there he came, his old grandfather, Ensign Stål. He was wearing his uniform from the Slesvig war—the one which hung in a glass case in the parlour; he had four medals on his chest, white gloves on his hands, and the huge silvery moustaches stuck out waxed and stiff on each side of the thin, withered face. He walked between the straight lines of citizens, school-children, and soldiers as if he were one of the town's most eminent dignitaries. Suppressed titters received him.

The apparition was at once so unexpected and so strange that no one attempted to stop him, not even the town magistrate or the chief of police. Rigid as a poker he strode towards the entrance to the station, over which hung the king's monogram.

And there he remained "standing at ease," with his arms hanging loosely at his side and the right foot a half-pace in front of the left, in correct military style. From time to time he gently stroked his waxed moustaches and changed feet.

The account he gave at the subsequent domestic cross-examination showed that he had planned his coup—to greet his beloved sovereign in person—in the most minute detail. He had told old Fru Lekholm that he did not want to see the ceremonies. It was rather cold, and he did not want to catch a chill. But the moment she and their daughter

Charlotte had left the house, in plenty of time, the old man had got to work. He had taken out his uniform, brushed it, put it on, put on his medals and then sat down and waited, so that he might reach the station at the moment the royal train steamed in. If he did this no one would have time to interfere with him. And he calculated quite correctly; he had not been standing there for more than a few minutes when the beflagged engine crept into the station, and no one gave any further thought to the lacemaker.

Five minutes later the king and his two sons appeared at the door leading from the platform. The regimental band struck up a march, the battery commander gave the order to shoulder arms, the guns up on the old ramparts thundered out the first of their twenty-one shots. . . .

Then a strange thing happened.

His majesty caught sight of the lacemaker, who was saluting him right at the foot of the steps, standing stiffly at attention with his right hand correctly raised to the peak of his cap.

The king stopped.

"Who are you?" he asked. "In what regiment have you served?"

"Your Majesty, my King and master," the lacemaker replied, "the uniform I am wearing is that of the Danish infantry, and I served as a private in the first company of the 5th battalion of the line in the first Slesvig war in '48 and '49. I have come to pay my duty to my sovereign."

"Thank you. What was your profession?" the king asked.

"I am a citizen of this town, was a master-lacemaker, and used to supply lace and braid to your Majesty's royal artillery regiment here."

The king clapped the veteran genially on the shoulder and called his sons Gustav and Carl, while he fingered the lacemaker's Dannebrog cross.

"Gustav," he said, half-turning to the crown prince,

"here's a gallant old Swede who's got an order none of us have got, or have any likelihood of ever getting."

"We don't live in such times, papa," the crown prince answered.

"No, we don't," the king replied, "and Heaven send we never shall. But all the same, I'm always delighted when I see anyone with this beautiful medal. What is your name, and what did you get it for?"

"Your Majesty, my name is Pehr Anders Lekholm, and I received the medal for bravery in the battle of Kolding."

Both princes shook hands cordially with the hero, while the king clapped him on the shoulder again and at the same time, as though he had knighted him, turned to one of his adjutants and said:

"Lekholm shall have the Swedish silver medal for bravery in the field. It's none too soon."

He smiled again at the erect little old man and, according to the account which appeared in the local paper next day, took a long look at his still keen, vigorous features.

Not till this scene was over did his Majesty proceed to inspect the battery, while the lacemaker, still standing at attention, was congratulated by the whole of the brilliant royal suite.

When Pehr Anders Lekholm returned to his little home he had a curious reception from his wife and daughter. Fru Lekholm cursed him; Charlotte was dissolved in tears, bewailing the fate which had decreed that, thanks to her fool of a father, she had never had a moment's happiness in the whole of her life.

What had happened was, briefly, this. When Fru and Fröken Lekholm, who were among the spectators at the corner of the market-place and Kyrkogatan, caught sight of the lacemaker and heard the ironical remarks and titters of the crowd that surrounded them, they fled in panic and

went straight home to hide the disgrace in which they had been plunged.

The lacemaker stood for a few moments listening to their outburst of anger and hatred; then he suddenly banged the table with his fist with something of his old strength, and said:

"Silence! the silence of the grave! My sovereign has talked to me and presented his sons to me. Silence!"

And there was silence. The two women stared at him. They thought he had gone mad. His stiff waxed moustaches trembled, his body shook in the old uniform as if he had the ague; a second later he put his hands before his face like a child and wept, wept for joy without shedding tears, as a dried-up old man does.

Both the newspapers of the town, both the Conservative organ and the dreadful Socialist rag, agreed, in their account of the previous day's events, that the king's meeting with "our revered old veteran and hero of days long past" had been the most remarkable moment of a most remarkable day.

BOOK TWO

I

It was one of the lacemaker's sons, the musical Anders, who for several years to come indisputably played the most important part in the family chronicles. But long before the Lekholm grandchildren realized how much room he and his doings occupied on the narrow stage of family life, he occupied a prominent and romantic position in the outside world. There was, for that matter, hardly a single boy in the town to whom he had not, for some period of varying length, appeared as a revelation from loftier, unattainable spheres. There was probably not a single boy between five and eight who had had one fleeting glimpse of Anders without being stirred by his brilliant, festal aspect to dreams of a glorious future.

The fact was that Anders Lekholm in those days used to march at the head of the guard which at noon every day passed along Västra Storgatan to headquarters. And not only did he march at the head of all the other bandsmen: he also played the monster bass, the largest and heaviest instrument in the band, the one which in every respect set the tune, which could be heard above all the others like the lowing of a cow, or the voice of a giant shouting from a cellar—something magnificent and terrible.

To every boy who followed the march from its beginning, that is to say the falling-in on the barrack-square, it was clearer still what a dominating part he played in that daily display of shining instruments, gleaming sabres, black plumes and clinking spurs. For it was he and no other who determined when the brilliant formation should march off. It could certainly be theoretically argued that it was the lieutenant in command with his "Battery, forward, march!" who

represented directing will and the decisive voice. But all the same, it was clear to anyone that there would be no changing of the guard at all till Sergeant Lekholm had made his decision. More than once—for a most regrettable reason—it had happened that Uncle Anders had not immediately obeyed the lieutenant's command. The result had been that the whole battery had to mark time till Lekholm had got under way.

In normal circumstances the ritual was as follows. First Anders Lekholm brushed his bushy moustache out of the way with the back of his left hand. Then he raised his heavy instrument in the air; once, as a sign that all the other bandsmen should arrange their moustaches and dry their lips; a second time, whereupon all put their instruments to their mouths; and a third and decisive time, on which the regimental march burst forth and the guard began to move. And the little lieutenant's shrill word of command was drowned in this march like a vain cry for help in a November gale.

What Uncle Anders's presence meant to this brilliant procession was best proved on the occasions when a substitute took his place. It seemed then as if the sun had gone out, and the small boys who lined the pavement nudged one another and said:

"Lekholm's drunk again."

When Dr. Charles Holmes, alias Kalle Lekholm, in his manhood looked back to early times, and thought of his childhood and its momentous events, he sometimes felt that it was just Uncle Anders who helped him to fix the date at which he really ceased to be altogether a child. That was the day on which the sight of Sergeant Lekholm in all his splendour first failed to send cold thrills of admiration and enthusiasm coursing down his spine; the day when he realized the elemental absurdity of the strutting little figure—the instrument much too large for his stature, the round pro-

jecting stomach, the thin legs in the mercilessly tight, clinging trousers, the ludicrously swollen cheeks when he blew, the eyes which seemed to be growing and forcing themselves out of their sockets, the white-fringed eyelids which blinked ceaselessly as if in an endeavour to prevent his eye-balls from tumbling out on to the roadway. . . .

On the day when one noticed these details of the brilliant, festal *ensemble*, one ceased to be a child; the critical sense had begun to cloud the boundless enthusiasm, the unqualified adoration, which is the need of earliest childhood. . . .

But for those who, like Kalle Lekholm, came into close touch with Uncle Anders, he did not on that account cease to be a source of pleasure, to which one fled from the duties of school and home. Or rather, it was his home which was the source of pleasure. For this home, which—certainly against his will, and in a careless, irresponsible manner—he had made for himself and his large family, was for boys a paradise within doors. There was in the three small rooms the atmosphere of stuffiness, overcrowding and happiness, whose attraction for children has only been plausibly explained, thanks to Freud, in our own time. Here no objects were sacred: there was no furniture, whose polished mahogany surfaces might not be touched by careless, dirty boys' hands, no carpets which could be damaged by muddy or snowy boys' boots, no treasures in the shape of china figures which could tumble from their lofty dwelling-places in the middle of an exciting game, no cane hidden behind a shut wardrobe door. It was Liberty Hall—one of the forgotten, ruined annexes of the Shut Paradise.

At times, when the noise, screaming or quarrelling of the flock of children, to whom Uncle Anders became father in truly record time, rose to an abnormal pitch of violence, he would interfere in his own exalted person and command silence. On these occasions he used to arm himself with his monster bass, open the door of the room where the noise

was going on, push his big moustache out of the way, put the instrument to his mouth and low like a bull. Then he removed it from his lips again and said:

"Silence here!"

A moment later he went back to his interrupted occupation, which, according to the hour of the day, might consist in lying asleep on the dining-room sofa, playing cards and drinking coffee and brandy with some of his friends, or sitting and composing at the dining-room table on a big sheet of paper ruled with many black lines. For a few minutes after the rebuke the children were quiet; then the game began again in a slowly rising crescendo, till the noise was as loud as ever. Uncle Anders did not give more than two warnings. The second time the lowing was a few seconds more prolonged than the first time, and the seriousness of the situation was further emphasized by the words:

"Look out, you kids, or old Nick'll take you!"

After this second warning one could continue undisturbed without any further interference on his part. If he had been wakened from his slumbers on the dining-room sofa, he usually thrust himself into his uniform coat and went to Berggren's tavern, which by a dispensation of Providence was on the ground floor of the house where he lived. If he had been disturbed when composing, and the spirit was particularly strong in him, he went heroically past the tavern to the regimental music-room to resume his converse with his muse. If, on the contrary, he had friends with him, playing cards and drinking brandy and coffee, they simply moved into the room of "Uncle" Jocke, a regimental comrade of Uncle Anders's, cornet-player and bachelor, who rented the end room of the flat.

There was no need to consider Fru Lekholm, Aunt Hulda. She was to be found for the most part out in the kitchen with her last baby, when not serving coffee to her husband and his friends. She counted for nothing in the

household. She had been a serving-maid at Berggren's tavern and was therefore accustomed to din; she loved life, noise and movement.

It is not surprising, therefore, not only that Sergeant Lekholm was loved by his sons for the boundless freedom in which he let them grow up, but also that the boys who enjoyed their friendship, and the much sought-for honour of visiting them in their home, were all very fond of Uncle Anders.

Sometimes, when Anders Lekholm was in a specially good humour—that is, when he had drunk more than usual—he encouraged his sons' guests to yell still louder than they were doing. On such occasions he would turn to one of his own nephews, Carl's boys, of whom there was generally at least one present, and say:

"Yell, my boy, yell till your lungs burst. You mayn't yell at home except when your father licks you—and hardly even then, poor little devil! Are you licked much at home nowadays?"

There was silence in the room; and only after a long pause, punctuated by giggles and digs in the ribs, came the answer, shy and hesitating:

"Sometimes."

"Are you afraid of your father?"

"Yes."

"Why are you afraid of him?"

"Everyone is."

"Do you think *I'm* afraid of him too?"

Silence. Or a dubious "No"—an obligatory lie told against better knowledge, for the sons of Carl, the "mathe-matician," had discovered at a very early stage of their lives that Uncle Anders "trembled in his riding-breeches" when he was summoned to his elder brother's presence to account for his misdeeds.

"No, you're not afraid of father."

"Do you know what's wrong with your father?"

"No."

"He's jealous of me. Yes, of me."

The boy was silent.

The thought of his brother the "mathematician" had by this time, combined with the excitement induced by drink, caused Uncle Anders's face to assume a bluer tint than ever; his eyes, with their bloodshot whites, bulged out of their sockets just as when he played the monster bass, and his voice grew hoarse.

"And do you know why he's jealous of me?"

Silence.

"Because I'm an artist. And he's not. Because he knows that in reality I'm miles above him—you've no idea how far! Tell him that when you get home!"

Silence.

"For that matter, you needn't tell him. He knows it damned well himself. But there is something you can tell him. And that is that my boys'll leave his standing some day, for all the lickings and strict upbringing you get. And do you know why?"

Silence.

"Well, I'll tell you; because my kids, poor as they are, have got art in their blood. And a lad who's got that doesn't need to be a student. He becomes an artist. And one doesn't need to be anything more than that in this world. For that matter, one *can't* be anything more. Tell him that! Don't forget!"

These messages were never delivered. The boys hardly gave them a thought, except a mental note that Uncle Anders was drunk again. That their cousins had "art in their blood," or were artists and would some day be great men, was delusion born of brandy. The eldest boy, whom his father had proudly named after himself, had certainly en-

tered the elementary school. But he had spent two years in each class, and had moreover earned himself a reputation by smashing twenty-three window-panes at the artillery stables one evening. The other boys had never got beyond the national school. This talk of their future greatness could, therefore, be attributed to the fact that Uncle Anders had had "a drop too much."

The question whether Uncle Anders could be regarded as "miles above" their own father was, on the other hand, a matter for discussion among boys of nine or ten even after their eyes—doomed henceforth to lifelong disillusionment—had been opened to the hollowness and absurdity of Uncle Anders's prominent position in the changing of the guard. The question could give rise to profound reflection even in boys who, like the "mathematician's" sons, saw in their father the loftiest human type imaginable.

The fact was that Uncle Anders had more sides to his personality than that which he displayed to a critical sense when the guard marched through the streets. For example, when some opera or operetta company came to the town. Then he used to sit in the narrow slit of an orchestra as a first violin. Here, too, after the conductor, who only waved a baton in the air, he took the leading place. He now presented a less ludicrous appearance; instead of the tight uniform he wore a tail-coat with a white tie; his goggle eyes became half-closed and dreamy; his right arm moved caressingly and gracefully above the strings, and he leaned his head a trifle sideways as though listening to mysterious voices from beneath the dingy tiles of the orchestra floor.

But the fact which weighed heaviest of all in the scales in which the little Lekholms weighed him against their own father was that Uncle Anders was a composer. He had written waltzes and polkas, a quadrille and a lancers. They had actually been printed and, during the dancing season after Christmas, were sometimes displayed in the window of

Anderberg's bookshop with his own name, Anders Lekholm, on the title-page in letters representing intertwined boughs of trees.

They were played every year, too, when the dancing master, Herr Lindquist, came to the town and held his dancing classes. One had a peculiar feeling of pride in being able to say to one's partner, "My uncle composed this waltz." Sometimes one received the answer, "The one who drinks so?" But even this fact considerably augmented his greatness, at least when one's knowledge had reached a point at which one could reply with a superior smile: "Didn't Tegnér drink? And Lidner? And Bellman? Haven't all the Swedes who have been great in literature and art drunk like fishes?"

Uncle Anders's little weakness for strong drink was, therefore, a further and indisputable proof of his greatness as an artist. This, moreover, was openly acknowledged even by Major Rosenstjerna, who also had composed music; he had declared on more than one occasion that Sergeant Lekholm was much his superior in this field.

Uncle Anders's creative activity was not, however, confined to light music. For many years he had been composing something he intended to call "Jephthah's Daughter," a work on a large scale which caused him the greatest difficulties and was a source of frequent lamentation. And—the goal and crown of all his endeavours, the summit of his ambition as an artist—he was to write a funeral march. He would sometimes explain, emphasizing every sentence with blows of his fist on the table:

"I'm going to write a funeral march some day, a funeral march so damned stirring that it'll beat Chopin himself. If only I feel in the mood. A funeral march—that's the greatest, most profound work of art there is. It wants a musician of genius to write a march so moving that it sends cold thrills down the back of every soul who hears it. *And I'm*

that musician. A funeral march that shall embrace life and death, that shall describe the chill of death, grief and despair, and the joy of resurrection. It's no light job. And what's wanted above all is, that one shall feel in the mood—feel in the mood!"

The effect of Uncle Anders's whole personality when he talked about his funeral march was to the youthful listener violently incongruous. On one side the round head with the bloodshot goggle eyes, the corn-coloured hair, the big moustache, so fair as to be almost white, with its central part brown with tobacco juice, the bloated, inflamed face with the long, blue, hooked nose; on the other the chill of death, the black night of despair, and the triumphant fanfares of the resurrection, of which he spoke.

His older listeners could smile or laugh in their sleeves. A younger listener, of a more serious turn of mind, could only shudder, in an instinctive terror of life's grisly inconsequence. What mysterious, grotesque powers could they be that called to life in such a body the notes to which men and women are borne to their eternal rest, to the heaven which, as Holy Writ tells us, makes all things plain?

II

The question whether the musical Lekholm was so infinitely superior to his elder brother the "mathematician" was one of those questions to which those most nearly interested, in this case the mathematician's sons, did not receive any convincing answer, at any rate, not during the years when a boy expects his father to be superior to all other fathers.

They could certainly have asked their mother. But their instinct told them beforehand that in this case she was

bound to be partial and could not give a perfectly objective answer.

There was only *one* person on earth on whose judgment in the question they would have absolutely relied; and that was their own father. But they could no more turn to him than they could have gone to God the Father with a request for enlightenment on one or another of the questions that occupied their thoughts. They could go to their father and ask him for a pencil, a school-book or five öre for a new india-rubber. But the boys did not trouble him with questions about things which touched on the most profound problems of life. It was hard to say why. For one thing, they knew beforehand that he would consider the question childish. In the second place, they were afraid of him. They had been afraid of him as far back in the morning of their life as they could remember. And their fear had become stronger as they had gradually discovered that everyone else was afraid of him. In the town he was nicknamed "Grumpy Lekholm," or "Old Erik," a common euphemism in the place for the devil himself. His sons very soon came to know these nicknames; when they made a new acquaintance in a backyard or out in the boulevard, the first question put to them was:

"Is it your father whom they call Old Erik?"

The mathematician's appearance, too, might well inspire alarm. He was tall, lean and sinewy. He had a long, thin face with a long, hooked nose, a bushy, hanging moustache over thin, tightly closed lips, and he wore his hair combed forward over each ear in a style called a hussar's curl, which gave his hard expression something foreign, alien, almost cruel; people in the town used to say he looked like a regular janissary. The strained expression of his face combined the racking pain of chronic toothache and deep-rooted misanthropy. But the most terrifying of all his attributes was his look—steel-grey, hard, cold and penetrating. It was like

an operating knife which with one swift cut laid bare all lies and all humbug. His speech was curt and decisive; he expressed himself by preference in the form of commands and required brief, definite answers. When he came into the room where the boys were playing or sitting doing their lessons, they had to rise at once and remain "standing at ease" until he himself, with a curt nod of command, indicated that they might sit down again. He never caressed any of them. His sons could not remember ever having sat on his knee. They never heard him laugh, they seldom saw him smile. And when he did, it was not a real smile; all that happened was that the tension of his face was relaxed. It was as though the torturing toothache had ceased for a moment or two.

He worked from early in the morning till late at night. In the afternoons, when his duty was over for the day, he gave lessons in mathematics to schoolboys or sub-lieutenants who were going to the artillery or engineering schools in Stockholm. For a few hours in the week he taught arithmetic in the new secondary school for girls. The house had to be quiet the whole afternoon; there was always someone sitting doing sums in his room. At frequent intervals his curt, hard voice was heard raised in rebuke. Sometimes there were scenes, when he called some sub-lieutenant a block-head.

"What the devil do you mean by calling your superior a blockhead?" the lieutenant would exclaim.

"When a superior is stupid, I shall tell him so. I shall do as I please here. Rank doesn't count in my room. If you're not satisfied with my teaching, you had better go."

And the door was slammed; the lieutenant had gone.

Kalle Lekholm and his brothers used to steal into the parlour and listen at the door of their father's room when lessons were going on. They hardly dared breathe; they shivered with curiosity, and were terrified at the possible result of these scenes; would the lieutenant put their father

under arrest for "insubation"? Sometimes, at meals, they found their mother red-eyed. She and their father were talking about some act of insubordination he had committed, and the possibility of his having to leave the regiment. But their father only answered:

"One isn't a dog because one happens to be an N.C.O."

After supper he sat at his writing-table till late at night and worked at statements and accounts which had been given to him to draw up. Sometimes he was so tired, and leaned so hard against the edge of the writing-table, that he had to have a cushion between it and his ribs to prevent it from hurting.

At seven every morning he was on horseback and rode for an hour. He was considered a hard rider, and generally rode remounts which for one reason or another were hard to manage.

Long before the mathematician's sons had guessed the secret which lay behind their father's hardness and severity, they had realized that, along with his severity, they had certain obvious advantages to set off against the much-envied freedom at Uncle Anders's. The differences between the two households gave them ample food for thought. Kalle Lekholm and his brothers were better off generally than their cousins. They were better dressed. They got more Christmas presents and more valuable ones.

The furniture in the mathematician's home was quite different, too, from that of their uncle the musician—polished mahogany drawing-room chairs with tassels, a gold-framed mirror, and Ensign Stål's Legends and the Angel of Death on the parlour table. The double-bed in the bedroom was of mahogany, too. The bookcase in their father's room contained Starbäck, Wallis's history of the world, the poems of Tegnér and von Braun, Rydberg's *Bible History of Christ*, Sigurd's stories, Erik Bögh's poems (in Danish),

and "8,000 foreign words." The meals were more abundant than at Uncle Anders's and were served on a proper white table-cloth. They had beer only once a week, on Saturdays, and they had cooked food for supper.

No pocket-money was ever given. An unlimited generosity, however, was shown as regards books and school necessities. The boys had only to knock at the door of his dreaded room, wait for the curt order, "Come in-n-n!" stand at attention inside the door and wait till he looked up.

"What is it?"

"A book."

"Must you have it?"

"It's a school-book."

"Go to the bookseller's and have it put down to me!"

In all these things he was generosity itself. He was only severe in matters of offence; neglect and equivocation were swiftly and effectively punished:

"Go into the lobby and fetch the riding-whip. Then come into my room and take down your breeches."

The punishment was considered to have effected an immediate cure; whenever the whip had been put back in its place in the lobby not a word more was said about the offence. There were no long-drawn-out reprisals. The boys were brought up according to the principles for breaking in remounts: plenty of exercise, whip and spurs when necessary to check shying and bad behaviour, but no punishment in the stable itself.

It was clear to the mathematician's boys at a very early stage of their lives that there was method in his dispensation of generosity and severity. As soon as they went to the kindergarten it was impressed upon them that a specially heavy responsibility rested upon their shoulders. More was expected of them than of other children. They must be among the best in their class. Why it was so, and must be so, they did not at first understand. They knew only *one* thing:

they must do well. Five or more AB's in the term's report were rewarded with a brand-new krona piece, three AB's with a fifty-öre piece, and one with a twenty-five öre piece, which, unfortunately, after a brief and painful inspection, had to be placed in a money-box, to be transferred later on to the savings bank. Not even the most excellent report ever led to any other comment. Not a word of praise was ever uttered: not an expression of satisfaction, pleasure or surprise. It was as though a good report was only what was due. A bad report, on the other hand, led to a long and searching cross-examination, culminating in a curt order to fetch the riding-whip and take down one's breeches.

There was no question about it; the boys *must* make progress, must adapt the ignorance and playfulness of their childhood and youth to that harsh climate, in which a puritanical sense of duty prevailed for eight months of the year and the deadly dullness of a clear conscience was the highest form of pleasure known: nothing else could be done in term-time without pangs of conscience and a pricking fear that they were endangering their future.

In the holidays, again on the principles on which re-mounts are fed up, they were sent out to grass at the neighbouring seaside village.

On his promotion from the third to the fourth class of the elementary school each boy was initiated into the inner significance of the iron discipline in which he and his brothers had been brought up. This promotion was, indeed, a milestone in a schoolboy's life. He had now to decide which line he would take—to choose Latin or English. It was then, during a conversation, or rather a monologue, which took place in their father's room, that they understood the nature of the responsibility that rested upon them. They were to go to the university. They *must* go.

It was, in fact, nothing less than the old lacemaker's idea,

which had now been taken up by his son. But although the idea was the same, there was a fundamental difference between the lacemaker's foolish dreams of some day promenading the streets with his sons the doctor, the judge and the mayor, and the plans the mathematician wished to realize as regards the future of *his* sons. They were woven of a more genuine material, and were coloured by his own bitter experiences.

When this important period in each boy's life arrived he was called into his father's much-feared room and was invited to sit down in a tone faintly tinged with amiability.

The mathematician began to walk up and down the floor, stopped at the window, began walking again, and as he walked he told his son the story of his own life. He talked not as a father talks to his children but as one man to another, curtly and sharply, as if he had been out reconnoitring on manoeuvres and was reporting his observations of the enemy's position.

"You've done well enough so far. And I want you to go to the university. When I was a boy I had only one aim all the time—to go to the university. My father had promised that I should. I know my masters, especially my mathematical master, thought I ought to go to the university. And then, as perhaps you have heard, our family suffered a misfortune. Your grandfather lost all he had. It meant poverty for us. I was in the lower sixth then. When I was eighteen I enlisted in the artillery. There were plenty of other professions I could have chosen. I could have gone into a chemist's shop or a bookseller's, or the post office, or one of the railways. But I was desperate and bitter. I felt that I had been shamefully cheated of my future.

"God forgive me, but I hated my old father and two or three other people to whom I secretly turned for help. They said no. They excused themselves by saying what a bad time it was. No doubt they thought my plans for the fu-

ture were too ambitious. I had wanted to study mathematics. Instead, I went and enlisted. There was a little method in my madness, although I have difficulty now in understanding how I could have used such foolish arguments then. But I hoped there would be a war soon. People used to say that sooner or later Sweden would have to go to war with Russia. And I thought: here's a way out for me. I shall distinguish myself in the war in one way or another and get my commission like that, as thousands and thousands of poor Swedish lads had done in old times. But no war came, and so I couldn't get my commission. Instead, I had to accustom myself to standing still and marking time, waiting for my turn to come for promotion. It made no difference how hard I worked. I could never rise above sergeant-major. I hadn't been to the university."

He stopped by the window again and looked down over the barrack-square, where the newly arrived recruits were practising the military salute. He turned the quid which lay close to his right wisdom tooth.

"You mustn't think I've any hatred of the community because I can't become anything more than what I am. The community is like that. I didn't come into the world to put it right. The Socialists can do that, and we can only hope they'll use lawful means. I sympathize with them in many ways. But I hardly think that in my own branch any change is desirable or necessary. I'll tell you one thing. There are two kinds of people—men and rotters. And there are rotters in every class and every rank. It may be that the epaulettes aren't always to be found on the worthiest shoulders, and that even a colonel's cap can crown a head in which the grey matter is well mixed with cork or sawdust. But that doesn't mean that the great Napoleon was right when he said there was a marshal's staff in every corporal's knapsack. I'll tell you a secret about people. There are so damned few of them who are born leaders, who have brains and char-

acter, whom one can respect and follow. In fact, I can tell you at once that there are devilish few men like that.

"I don't know which category you'll belong to when you're grown up, and that's a matter in which your mother and I can do nothing. But what we can do for you and your brothers is to give you a chance, so that you needn't feel your future trammelled as I and thousands of others have done. That's a thing one *owes* both to one's self and to one's children. Your mother and I brought you into the world; you didn't ask if you might come here. It is our duty to see that you get the best bringing-up our small means can give you. That's why we're ready to wear ourselves to the bone if it's necessary. We want you to go to the university. It's your duty to become fit to go. And that duty may under no circumstances and on no conditions be neglected or scamped. Your parents are sacrificing both leisure and enjoyment for its sake. And it *is* a sacrifice. I can tell you in confidence that your mother and I considered the matter long and thoroughly before we decided to do it. We decided to do it. We decided to sacrifice the pleasure of our lives to your future. We give up a great deal for it. And we have to. It isn't easy to bring you up as your mother and I agreed that we should on a sergeant-major's pay. We both have to work from morning to night to earn extra money. And so you must do your duty as well! Do you understand?"

The boy rose:

"Yes, father."

"Then you can go."

One after one, in turn, at intervals of a few years, the mathematician's four boys left their father's room, fiery red in the face at the thought of the responsibility whose serious nature had now been made clear to them. They closed the door noiselessly behind them, and outside in the parlour, among the white antimacassars and stiff chairs,

they swore a solemn oath never, never to forget the words their father had just spoken.

From that afternoon, far more important and serious than their confirmation, which took place a few years later, they understood their father, his hardness and his severity as they had never done before. This new understanding did not bring with it any greater intimacy or confidence; their fear of him had become too essential a part of their organisms ever to be expelled. But his severity, inexorable as it was, had become more human.

And their understanding of their father was combined with a new feeling, which he himself would have been the first to extirpate by every means in his power—they felt sorry for him. Their father had had bad luck. They became more and more firmly convinced that he had got into the wrong place. The bitter contrast between his abilities and his social position seemed to them more and more grotesque the more they thought about it. It was he, and not the captain, who ought to give orders. Life and circumstances had thrust him down. He was really quite a different man from what he seemed—a born leader, a natural chieftain, a head taller than all the men before whom he now had to stand at attention and salute rigidly. His boys knew well enough what he meant when he said there were so damned few real men in the world. He was one of those few. . . .

It would not be true to say that this conviction became firmer as year after year passed—that was impossible—but it received more and more positive proof. A vast amount of tasks outside his ordinary duties were allotted to him. With the intelligence officer, Major Bong, who was a recognized mathematical genius and was actually an instructor at the artillery and engineering school, he invented a range-finder which was adopted. But he could not rise above the rank of sergeant-major.

The impossibility of his being promoted filled his sons with bitterness against the community. Even as an old, grey-haired man he would be compelled to salute any lad of a lieutenant into whom he had instilled mathematics in his spare time. It was a strange community in which such a thing could be permitted, in which clearly proved superior ability had no possibility whatever of making itself felt and assuming the position that was its by right.

It was hard on him. It was no wonder he had become embittered in a world of humbug, where the emptiest individuals wore the finest raiment. They understood how it was that he could never laugh, never smile except in scorn, never caress, never praise. They understood that he *must* punish, because his own life was a punishment and a torment.

But they would be avenged. In one way or another they would give him the satisfaction he demanded.

When only in the lower sixth the mathematician's eldest son, in his brothers' presence, wearing his father's riding-boots, took a solemn vow some day to be colonel of the regiment in which his father had led a life of toil as a non-commissioned officer.

III

And yet a convincing answer had not been given to the question: was not Uncle Anders right when he declared that he stood so high above their father that "they could have no idea of it"?

It was now many years since his brilliant aspect at the changing of the guard had seemed to them the embodiment of ceremonial magnificence. It was several years, too, since they had discovered that the liberty which prevailed in his home had the most devastating results both for himself and for his children, who were dressed all anyhow, and

sometimes even in rags. There was no question that their own father was superior to any lieutenant or captain, and that the invention of the new range-finder put him on a level with the colonel himself.

But poor and run to seed as he was, there was something in Uncle Anders that their own father lacked—something in him which always caused the mathematician's sons a curious sensation of pleasurable expectation, a faint thrill along the spine as though in the presence of something alive, something surprising, inexplicable both in its origin and in its manifestation. And this something was what he himself used to call the artist in him.

When he was "in the right mood," he would take a pencil and ask:

"What have I got in my hand?"

"A pencil."

Then he would raise his heavy moustache so that his front-teeth were visible, and point to them.

"What are these?"

"Your front-teeth."

"And what's this?"

He tapped his front-teeth with the pencil, and the result was a tune—the Swedish army tattoo, "Under the Double Eagle," or some other regimental march. And he would laugh and say:

"You see! Your father would say it was a pencil plus a few front-teeth. And so it is, if you like. And especially if all one can do is to add a to b . But it's something more; it's music, it's poetry. But you don't understand that. I'll let you have it again."

He began to hammer out the army tattoo again. And when he had finished he said:

"And it isn't only the army tattoo. It's a camp. Ljungbyhed, or anywhere you like. Rows of tents. A summer evening. The sun's just setting, as yellow as a hard-boiled egg

behind the black fir woods. The officers are sitting on the mess verandah, drinking punch. The bats are beginning to fly. The first star is shining. . . . But to your father it's just a street performer's trick. Tell him so from me!"

Or he would take his violin out of its case, lean his head on one side and tune it. Then he would say:

"Now this violin's tuned. Take it home to your father and ask him to play it—hear what it sounds like. Worse than a cat on the tiles. The neighbours'd come and kill him in two minutes. And when I got the violin back, it'd be so out of tune I couldn't get a note out of it. But now listen!"

He put the violin under his chin and began to play.

"What's that?"

"It's one of your waltzes."

"Yes, it is. But it's love and longing too. It's the poetry of love. That's what it is. It doesn't matter a straw whether it's three-quarter time, or who composed it. The love in it is the main thing. But you don't understand that, poor little devils! You may have got brains. You may go far in *your* way. But you've no poetry in you. And that's why I'm sorry for you. Tell your father so from me. Your mother had a little poetry in her once. But he's knocked it out of her. Tell him that too!"

It was not improbable that their father himself knew in his heart that Uncle Anders was so much his superior that "you boys can have no idea of it." The musician caused him, and the family in general, continual worry. But the only condemnation of Uncle Anders his sons heard him utter was that he had betrayed the confidence his fellow-men had placed in him.

"That fellow's failed in his duty," he used to say, and there was an infinite contempt in his tone.

Like his sister, Charlotte, Uncle Anders's musical talent had attracted attention when he was still a child. He was one of those people who can make musical instruments out of

anything they lay their hands on: combs, saw-blades, pencils and front-teeth. He could just as well have taken up the piano as the violin. But as Charlotte had for a long time been playing the piano, old Fru Lekholm chose the violin for the boy. He was her pride, the child of her heart. She dreamed of a brilliant career for him which would atone for all the ridicule that fool Lekholm had brought upon the family. Anders should study at the College of Music in Stockholm; Anders should become a great musician.

And then came the loss of the regimental contract, the crash, collapse, poverty.

When the lad was seventeen Major Rosenstjerna came to the rescue. For many years he had talked to Fru Lekholm about the boy's remarkable talent, and had never omitted to point out what a brilliant career might be his if he had an opportunity of developing his gifts. That was at the time when the foolish Lekholm was still regarded as a fairly well-to-do man. Immediately after the crash the quartette was broken up by the death of the judge Nolleroth; the disaster kept Fru Lekholm for the most part busy indoors, and she saw less and less of Major Rosenstjerna.

But one day, when Anders was in his eighteenth year, he came to call quite unexpectedly. He wanted to talk about the young musician's future. He had not forgotten him. He was still of opinion that Anders's gifts were so remarkable that he did not feel he could bear the responsibility of nothing being done to bring the lad's rich promise to fulfilment. And now he had a proposal to make. He and a few others, a sort of committee, would sign an appeal and have it published in the local paper, inviting the public, if inclined and willing to help, to contribute according to their means to enable the lad to continue his studies in Stockholm. To make this appeal less humiliating for a family which had seen better days and had found its resources diminished through no fault of its own, the major suggested

that Fru Lekholm, Mamsell Lekholm, he himself and young Anders should give a concert at the town hall at which a moderate entrance fee would be charged. He had arranged a programme for the concert: Fru Lekholm should play a few piano solos, she and the major a few duets, and Mamsell Charlotte and young Anders likewise a few duets, which would enable the public to convince themselves of the abundance of his natural gifts.

The appeal was published in the paper, signed by Major Rosenstjerna and the headmaster of Anders's school, subscription lists were displayed in Anderberg's bookshop, and at half-past twelve one Sunday the concert began before a large audience.

Next autumn young Anders was sent to Stockholm and was admitted to the Royal Musical Academy. He went to live *en pension* with the proprietor of Schulte's lacemaking business in Götgatan.

In this family he soon seemed to have made himself not merely popular, but positively worshipped, on account of his social gifts. Neither Herr Schulte nor his friends had, except on a concert platform, seen a young man who could not only play the piano, the violin, the concertina and the mouth-organ, but also blow tunes on a comb and, with the aid of an ordinary pencil and his front-teeth, play the Swedish army tattoo so convincingly that his hearers could see the campfires burning and the sun sinking behind the woods. Further, this richly endowed youth was a regular variety artist; he could put on ragged old clothes and sing comic couplets and topical songs with inimitable humorous patter. All these things were reported in the letters which master-lacemaker Schulte sent to his old fellow-journeyman and colleague down in Skåne.

Unfortunately, it became clear that Anders Lekholm, despite his talents, was as incapable of standing the Stockholm air as his uncle, "Dr." Oscar Lekholm, had been. The

spring after his arrival the sad news came that Herr Schulte could no longer keep the young musician under his roof. The reasons were numerous. He had waited till the last possible moment before making any complaint. But an unfortunate incident, involving a black velvet waistcoat with white spots belonging to himself, had now made it his painful duty to inform the young man's parents of his frivolity and his general moral defects.

The Lekholms of the third generation never altogether understood what part the velvet waistcoat had played in Uncle Anders's interrupted career. There was no question, however, that, after long discussions with Major Rosenstjerna, he was restored to his native town, was accepted as a bandsman in the regiment and clad in a humble private's uniform. His degradation in life made the atmosphere of the lacemaker's overcrowded little home gloomier than ever. Fru Lekholm could not even shed a tear; her pride, the child of her heart, had awakened her from the last beautiful dream of her life to the sordid daily round. Henceforth her heart was as shrivelled and bitter as a dry nut.

Whether Anders Lekholm, during the years that followed, was at all affected by the joyless gloom of his home, the annoyance of his patrons and the disapproval of his fellow-men, is not recorded in family tradition. It cannot, however, have been long before his natural cheerfulness, reinforced by his youth and his sociability, began to reassert itself. His social gifts, moreover, in so small a town and so restricted a circle as that in which he moved, were too brilliant to be allowed to be buried for ever, even under the thickest stratum of repentance. Stronger characters than his would have failed to resist the temptation, especially as it was the only alternative to Fru Lekholm's bitter lamentations and old Rosenstjerna's accusations of gross ingratitude towards his patrons, as well as unpardonable lack of artistic

conscience and sense of responsibility as a citizen. This explained, if it did not excuse, the impudent answer he once gave to Major Rosenstjerna when the latter lamented the premature death in him, Anders, of a great musician.

"*Herr Major*, the musician's not dead. He's only got screwed and gone to sleep afterwards."

He was now swallowed up in a new life. This new life was represented by Berggren's tavern in Östra Bulevarden. He was usually to be found there in his spare time—and a bandsman had a great deal.

Berggren's tavern certainly did not enjoy the highest reputation in the town. It ranked far below the restaurants where the citizens in general sought refreshment and recreation. At the same time, it could not be called a common ale-house. There were a good many mothers and wives in the town who called the place by even worse names. But that was due to other circumstances. It had, in fact, a peculiar position among the places of entertainment in the town and was frequented by a special clientèle.

Berggren's tavern was situated in a fairly new three-storied house opposite the cattle market. Whether the situation had been chosen with a view to the proximity of the cattle market, or the cattle market had given the tavern its special position among the local houses of refreshment, it is hard to say. One thing is certain—that the very name of Berggren's tavern brought curses to many women's lips for miles round the town. There, it was declared, the money paid for many horses, cows, sheep and pigs, for corn and vegetables in plenty, had disappeared without leaving a trace.

The owner of the tavern was one Herr Berggren, a little man of about forty-five at that time, who always wore a tail-coat and had a round face, a big cavalry moustache, close-cropped hair, a stomach like a beer-barrel and very short bowlegs. No one knew where he had come from. One ru-

mour declared that he had been a Skåne hussar in his youth. Another maintained that he had laid the foundations of his fortune as owner of a disorderly house in Humlegatan in Malmö. This fortune, according to popular legend, he had swelled to immeasurable proportions by playing cards with intoxicated farmers and winning from them the money they brought in with them from the cattle market which lay opposite.

Every night, after a fair or market day, rows of slumbering horses stood in the street near his establishment, and in the back of each cart sat a farmer's wife wrapped in a shawl, waiting for her husband, who was kept a prisoner within by the demon of gambling and drink in the shape of Herr Berggren. At last they came staggering out, surrounded by clouds of cigar smoke and exhaling an odour of nicotine and beefsteak and onions, having first been plucked naked and made so drunk that they could not explain how they had lost their money. On ordinary days the tavern was visited only by confirmed toppers among the small tradesmen, who shamled shyly and unsteadily to and fro between it and the little shop or office they were drinking to disaster.

It was this restaurant-keeper Berggren, himself a quiet, reticent, perfectly sober man, who got hold of Anders Lekholm. The young musician's reputation as an inexhaustible source of gaiety, an admirable performer with violin, concertina, comb and pencil, added to a dramatic gift, especially in rendering military ditties, caused him quickly to realize what an acquisition he might be to the establishment. He had especially in mind the part of the tavern which was called the "drawing-rooms"—two rooms which were separated from the other four, had an unobtrusive entrance of their own by the door which opened into Smalgatan, and were furnished with sofas, plush chairs, antimacassars, a marble topped table with iron feet, and a large oil painting of the repentant Magdalen on the main wall. This work, it was

affirmed, had once adorned the reception-room of Herr Berggren's disorderly house in Malmö. In this room a few of the really well-to-do farmers of the wealthy district met in distinguished seclusion—men who sat on the bench and belonged to rural councils, county councils, even Parliament itself.

There was nothing humiliating in Herr Berggren's offer to Anders Lekholm that on fair evenings, in return for free food and drink and possibly also a little *douceur*, he should entertain these local grandees with exhibitions of his talent. In the first place, Berggren knew how to garnish his proposal with smooth flatteries. Besides, it was obviously a great mark of distinction for a young man of nineteen to be permitted to associate—and, when they were under the influence of drink, on familiar terms—with magistrates, chairmen of rural councils, and county councillors, men of position with big farms, bulging wallets and money in the bank, even if their enthusiasm at the young man's performances could not be regarded as a conclusive estimate of his talent. The new rôle he was playing as professional enlivener was an entirely pleasant one; indeed, food and drink, praise, noisy applause and thumps on the back were obviously preferable to his mother's acid grumbling and Major Rosenstjerna's accusations of lack of artistic conscience. Nor could he tell to what this life might not lead. Life, especially an artist's, was full of surprises. Perhaps, one fine evening, one of these well-to-do patrons would put his hand on the place where both heart and his wallet were to be found, and amiably place the latter at his disposal for the further development of his rich natural gifts.

This, indeed, never happened. His new admirers, unlike Major Rosenstjerna and his other ex-patrons in the town, seemed entirely satisfied with his performances as they saw them. His plan of himself making such a proposal one evening was brought to nothing by his preference, characteristic

of a lyrical temperament, for hoping instead of acting. None the less, his new intercourse stimulated his creative faculty. These rich peasants, whose farms lay scattered about the fertile plain to the south of the town, often gave parties. And they began to ask Anders Lekholm to them, partly to amuse the other folk, partly to play dance music for the younger people. These invitations not only brought him in a little much-needed money, but soon kindled in him a passion for one of the daughters of farmer Carlson of Olstorp. The Olstorp waltz was written in her honour.

His love was not returned, but the Olstorp waltz continually brought him in orders for new waltzes and polkas. What was sauce for the goose was sauce for the gander; if Olstorp had got a waltz, Nygård and Isgrannatorp and Gärdsgård must have theirs. Anders Lekholm, whose grief at the scorning of his love had plunged him into a full tide of inspiration, supplied all these farms with their private dance music—melancholy, yearning waltzes, polkas of savage gaiety, *pas de quatre* full of courtly grace, and *graziel-las* brimming with Spanish life and sunshine. These orders too brought in money.

But the enthusiastic youth, who transferred his tender passion from one house to another with lyrical facility, could not become stepson to any of their owners. In one case, where his feeling seemed to be returned, the match broke down before the father's stubborn resistance. A farmer would not let his daughter marry a "fiddler."

Further, all his dreams of combining the pains of artistic creation with the pleasures of rural life were frustrated by an unfortunate occurrence. It appeared that he was shortly to become a father. The prospective mother was a serving-maid at Berggren's named Hulda Stål, daughter of a lame sawyer in the town, a well-built young woman with a mass of black hair, dark, warm, moist eyes and a prominent bosom concealed on fair and market days under a white silk blouse,

which by the end of the evening was covered with fingerprints from grimy rustic hands.

His fatherhood clearly caused no spiritual crisis of long duration in Uncle Anders. The family chronicles contain no record from this period except a peculiarly disagreeable encounter between Fru Lekholm and the sawyer Stål's wife, each of whom, to judge from oral family tradition, seems to have accused the other of failing to look after her child properly. The initial blame seems to have lain with Fru Lekholm, who, in the heat of the first encounter between the two mothers, called Fru Stål's daughter a hussy. Fru Stål replied by quietly asking what was the proper term for Fru Lekholm's scamp of a son, who played at Berggren's for food and drink.

Fru Lekholm replied to this insult by pointing out that the discussion was taking place in her kitchen and that she was accordingly within her rights in asking Fru Stål to go, especially as she, Fru Lekholm, had no wish to continue a conversation with "scum." Unfortunately, she accompanied the request by a grip on Fru Stål's arm and an eloquent gesture in the direction of the door. Fru Stål replied by putting her right hand under her shawl and thrusting her fist, thus protected, through a pane of the kitchen window.

At this moment the situation was further complicated by the lacemaker's appearance on the scene. For some reason he had armed himself with his volunteer rifle. At the sight of the weapon the sawyer's wife gave a heart-rending shriek and dashed out into the yard and through the front gate into the street, crying:

"He's going to murder me, he's going to shoot me, the devil! Help, help! he's going to shoot me!"

A lull of half an hour or three-quarters of an hour followed, after which Fru Stål returned to the Lekholms's little house, this time accompanied by her husband, the lame, bearded sawyer, who had armed himself with his axe for

all eventualities. The Ståls were not received by the Lekholms. Warned by the sound of Fru Stål's shrill voice when she and her husband entered the yard, accompanied by quite a respectable crowd for such a small town, Fru Lekholm had bolted the kitchen door. Fru Stål had to content herself with expressing her thoughts and feelings through the broken window, while the sawyer hovered in the background, mumbling threats and significantly testing the edge of his tomahawk with his thumb.

This scene, which attracted no small attention and was commented on for some time after—Fru Stål, indeed, threatened, to prosecute the hero of Kolding for carrying lethal weapons—had no influence whatever on the course of nature. In the fullness of time Hulda Stål, or, as she was commonly called, Hulda at Berggren's, gave birth to a daughter. The child was handed over to Fru Stål's care. Fru Lekholm refused, as she herself expressed it, to touch the child with a pair of tongs. Hulda returned to Berggren's tavern and two years later was again in an interesting condition, resulting in the birth of a second daughter. Anders was again the father.

The lovers' fate was now sealed. When Uncle Anders was promoted a year or two later he married Hulda Stål and went to live with her parents, who inhabited a wooden hut a little way out of the town, surrounded by a patch of ground on which potatoes were grown. Here then, although on a smaller scale, Uncle Anders found his dream realized—his dream of combining the pain of artistic creation with peaceful rusticity.

IV

All this had happened long before Dr. Holmes, alias Kalle Lekholm, had as a boy of seven or eight formed the habit of flying from the puritanical atmosphere of his own home

to Uncle Anders's paradise. At this later period the musician and his family lived in the same house as Berggren's tavern, in rooms on the first floor, reached from the yard and looking on to Östra Smalgatan. Herr Berggren, who had flourished exceedingly, had bought the whole house and, on his protégé being promoted to sergeant, had let these rooms to him, presumably in order to have him at hand in case of need—an arrangement of which Uncle Anders was never heard to complain.

At that time, too, Uncle Anders had passed through his worst years of storm and stress, and as a mature man, in the prime of life, had settled down as a good-humoured and on the whole quiet drinker.

It must be pleaded in his defence that both his temperament and his profession made this unfortunate state of things only too easy and natural. As has been briefly indicated, the predominance of the lyrical element in him laid fetters upon any energy and industry which may originally have formed part of his organism. Moreover, his profession compelled him to lead a life which consisted largely in doing nothing; and this leads to idleness, the mother of all the vices. His duties as sergeant in the regimental band were confined to an hour and a half's practice in the music-room, the daily march at the changing of the guard, and participation two or three times a week in the concerts which the band gave—in summer in the hotel gardens, in winter in the town hall. There were also the fairly frequent evenings spent in the orchestra when operas or operettas were being given by a travelling theatrical company.

Only on the autumn manœuvres was he compelled to do real military service in the capacity of battery trumpeter. He detested these manœuvres. They brought into his life an element of pressure and hurry which was quite out of keeping with his poetic, contemplative disposition, and filled him with terror because he was compelled to mount a horse.

His experiences had bred in him an active dislike of this noble animal.

But apart from these three weeks, which caused him so much mental and physical suffering, he could not be regarded as overworked. Private lessons could not fill his spare time to any degree worth speaking of; no one in the town wanted to learn the monster bass, and all too few the violin. It was, therefore, in the nature of things that Berggren's tavern came to play too large a part in his life after he had taken upon himself the responsibilities of a householder and father of a family.

His move to the house in which the tavern was proved advantageous in that he could go home from his potations without any publicity. It was dangerous for a man in uniform to be visibly intoxicated in broad daylight, and Uncle Anders had, unfortunately, on leaving Berggren's tavern, at times been unable to bear himself with the dignity expected of a warrior. He had been put under arrest—first with, then without, duty, and finally in "clink." He had by degrees reached the point at which he could be punished only twice more; after that only dismissal from the service awaited him. It was obviously, therefore, a great advantage for him to move to Berggren's house and be able to go straight to bed across the yard unseen of critical eyes.

This arrangement, however, came to an end in a few years as the result of a disagreement between Uncle Anders and the publican. After this breach he transferred his libations to his own home, where the move from the festal board to bed was still more easily accomplished. His rooms became the resort of various boon companions, and the cornet-player Jocke, who was a paying-guest of the family, used to act as deputy-host. This arrangement proved considerably cheaper than the visits to Berggren's tavern.

No middlemen were involved; as Uncle Anders expressed it, there was no need to throw money down the

throats of greedy publicans. Now he had only to send two of the elder girls down to Bergs, the spirit merchants', with an empty bottle and the necessary ready money. Hulda Lekholm, for her part, had no objection, either in principle or in practice, to this new arrangement. For her it was, on the other hand, a renewal of the occupation of her youth, with its movement, its gaiety, its fun, its laughter. It meant, too, a break in a housewife's monotonous daily round. A glass of brandy now and again in the course of the day was an effective means of driving away pain or indigestion. And whatever might be said against Uncle Anders, he was of a generous nature, and liked his wife to share his pleasures. Every time she came in with fresh coffee, he said:

"You take a little pick-me-up, mother. It's good for the digestion."

These years were without doubt, comparatively speaking, the happiest in Uncle Anders's life. He might still undergo two punishments; there was, therefore, no immediate danger of dismissal from the service, as long as he did not show himself in the streets drunk. He was still young. The children—that is to say, the boys—were small, and the necessity of pulling himself together and making an effort to secure their future was still remote. And he imagined the boys' future as very bright, as his father, the old lacemaker, had done before him. If human calculations counted for anything in life, his boys ought to be very musical. He had thought, too, that he could detect unmistakable signs of talent in them. Being artists, there was no need for them to acquire expensive book-learning. And there was plenty of time before he need come to a definite decision regarding their future.

Not even Uncle Anders, of course, escaped the black hours which are the essence of every artist's life. There was business, bills to get backed or accepted, stormy meetings with brother Carl in connection with some necessary trans-

action, painful scenes with sister Charlotte of a kind which always stung to disagreeable wakefulness the repentance which slumbered in the depths of his heart, and inquisitions and judgments before the family tribunal, with his eldest brother, Per, specially summoned for the occasion, as judge. Not to mention the continual threats of Andersson, the grocer, to allow no further credit.

But it was in these hours that his creative faculty came to fruition. Among other things, as has been said, he was wrestling with the idea of utilizing the at once brilliant and tragic destiny of Jephthah, judge of Israel, as the theme of a great oratorio. During his short stay at the College of Music, this had been the subject of a prize competition for the pupils in the highest class, and he took it up now.

For various reasons the subject appealed to him. Jephthah, the man of God, had, as everyone knows, been expelled from his family as an illegitimate son and led a wandering and highly irregular life for some years until, in the war against the Ammonites, he suddenly appeared in the rôle of Israel's saviour. Perhaps it was this part of Jephthah's proud but tragic life which kindled Uncle Anders's imagination. Perhaps he saw in the wandering, irregular early life of the man of God from Gilead a reflection of his own. Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter could hardly have had any symbolic counterpart in his own life. It is possible, on the other hand, that Jephthah's victory over the tribe of Ephraim suggested to Uncle Anders the manner in which he and his children would some day outstrip his brother the mathematician and his sons.

He often talked about this great oratorio when he was "in the right mood." He had imagined it in four parts. The first was to deal with the great Gileadite's youthful irregularities; the second with his election as chieftain of Israel; the third with the sacrifice of his daughter; while in the fourth and last part the crushing of the tribe of

Ephraim (here he gave Kalle Lekholm and his brothers a meaning look of his bloodshot eyes) would be described in passages of tremendous power. The first of these parts, dealing with Jephthah's chequered youth, was finished already. He had worked into it the waltzes, polkas, *pas de quatre* and graziellas which he had dedicated to neighbouring estates—the Olstorp waltz, the Nygård polka, the Isgrannatorp *pas de quatre* and the Gårdsgård graziella.

In the darkest hours of all, which generally followed painful encounters with his sister Charlotte, when he regarded his life as a failure, or at least as having belied its rich promise, his musical genius busied itself with thoughts of death and of his funeral march. This was to be his swan-song. When it was completed it was to be placed in a sealed envelope on which would be written in large letters, "To be opened immediately after my death. Anders Lekholm." Then, at his own funeral, the world would first hear the notes in which he had concentrated the whole majesty of death, and in whose opening bars the monster bass would lift up its mighty voice in a way which "would send cold thrills down the back of every devil who heard it," as Uncle Anders himself put it. In other words, he would show the world by this musical testament that, whatever sister Charlotte said, his life had *not* been a failure. With this funeral march, which he imagined as gradually supplanting Chopin's, at any rate in his own country, he would conquer oblivion and, with oblivion, death.

It can fairly be affirmed that this period, in spite of everything, was the midsummer of his life.

The autumn of his life came early, quite unanticipated by himself and entirely contrary to all that he intended.

As a result of the difference of opinion between Herr Berggren and himself, which is understood to have been

due to a business matter, Uncle Anders had vowed never to set foot in the tavern again. One morning, however, at about half-past ten, he broke his vow. His good nature made it impossible for him to remain on terms of permanent enmity with one whom he had known intimately for years, and who, moreover, was his landlord. He visited the publican one morning with the object of clearing up the misunderstanding, and was offered a glass or two as a mark of reconciliation.

Whether these glasses contained any peculiarly deadly ingredients was never clearly ascertained. However that may be, when Uncle Anders left Berggren's tavern at a quarter to twelve to take his place at the head of the column for the changing of the guard, he was so drunk that—in full dress uniform—he stumbled over his sword, lost his kepi in the gutter, fell down while vainly endeavouring to pick it up, and was unable to get up again.

Sergeant Anders Lekholm received his last punishment but one—three weeks' arrest without duty.

After this lamentable incident he changed his way of life. At his brother Carl's earnest advice—if so mild a term can be applied to their conversation—he became a member of the Good Templars' lodge "Well done," which had been established in the town a few years before.

V

The conference between the Lekholm brothers took place late in the afternoon of the day on which, on the stroke of twelve, the musician was released from the cells in which he had spent three weeks. It lasted a very long time. In the mathematician's home supper was kept waiting in an atmosphere of depression and impending disaster. At last, at half-past eight, the family sat down, and had just finished

their meal when the mathematician's key was heard in the lock, and he was heard to come in and absently place his sword in the umbrella-stand.

When he appeared at the dining-room door not a trace of what had passed between him and his brother was visible in his expression. He only nervously turned the quid which he always held cunningly concealed far inside his mouth, between the right wisdom-tooth of his lower jaw and his underlip. He nodded curtly by way of greeting and, without saying a word, went into his own room to wash his hands and remove the quid. Then, still without saying a word, he sat down at the table, put on his glasses, which years of work by artificial light had compelled him to use early in life, and tucked his napkin in between his neck and the collar of his uniform.

His wife gave him a quick glance of interrogation as she passed him the bread. But she dared not put a direct question. His sons sat rigid and silent, with their eyes fixed on their empty plates. They dared not even look at their father. Their thoughts were circling round the subject they had been discussing the whole afternoon, to the great detriment of their work: What had he done to Uncle Anders? Had he thrashed him with his riding-whip? They had seen that it was not hanging in its usual place in the lobby, so he must have taken it with him. And had Uncle Anders dared to hit back? Or had he made the same instinctive movement as they did when the riding-whip was produced—put both hands over his eyes and endeavoured to shield his face with his arm? For it sometimes happened that the mathematician, when punishing his sons, flew into a strange berserk passion and had no idea where his blows were falling. After such outbreaks he used to lock himself into his room, and their mother had confided to them, to console them, that he burst into tears of regret for his blind fury.

"You mustn't think ill of him," she used to say. "You

don't understand his severity and his violence. But you will some day. He's had to put up with so much injustice in his life. And it all breaks out like this at home sometimes; he just can't help it."

At last their father said, looking at his wife with a strange, almost tender smile which his sons had never seen before—a smile like the drawing of a heavy curtain for one single instant to yield a glimpse of a hidden world:

"Maria, have you begun to use my riding-whip to beat carpets with?"

Their mother blushed and looked uncomfortably at her children. But she did not answer. There was another long silence, and then their father said:

"He's to join the Good Templars' lodge to-morrow. And he moves from Berggren's on April 1st. I've been to Berggren myself and given him notice. It was simply awful at Anders's. I haven't been there for years. Shabby and dirty and run-to-seed. I hardly liked to shake hands with Hulda, she was such a sight. Utter squalor! Upon my soul, I can't see what the end of it'll be, if he doesn't turn over a new leaf now."

The mathematician's wife drew a long breath.

"Yes, I hope we shall be able to breathe a little more freely now. The last few years have been dreadful."

"And the *disgrace* of it!" their father continued, as he rolled up his napkin and thrust it into the ring. "I've sometimes felt I'd like to change my name, if it could have done any good. You boys, mind you do all you can to keep your name respected! A man who drags his family name in the dirt isn't fit to live! Mark what I say!"

The boys continued to stare at their empty plates.

It was as the mathematician's wife had hoped; the Lekholm family breathed freely for a few years—till the awful tragedy overtook Aunt Charlotte.

It came like a clap of thunder from a cloudless mid-summer sky. The members of the family stared at each other in terror, and the unspoken question was on the lips of each: Is *that* in our family, too? and who will be the next?

Aunt Charlotte was about forty at the time of the catastrophe. For ten years or more she had been a well-known figure in the town to both young and old. She used to play the piano at Herr Lindquist's dancing classes, which were held regularly in the town at intervals of a few years, and so came into contact with most of the sons and daughters of the upper and middle classes. She also gave piano lessons, and thanks to her low charge—fifty öre an hour—had secured a great many pupils, mostly girls of the middle class. She enjoyed among them an established reputation as a monster of ill-temper and cruelty: a small ruler which she held in her long, thin, bony hand during the lessons for the purpose of beating time was always ready to descend with pitiless edge on the fumbling fingers of the children, hopelessly confused and frightened by her ceaseless complaints of their idleness and lack of musical ability.

Among her pupils were her nephews, the mathematician's boys. The best possible education which he was endeavouring to give his children included, in his view, the ability to play "Napoleon's March Across the Alps" or "Blue Danube" without too many false notes. He attached all the more importance to this musical instruction in that, as a mathematician, he had calculated that his sons ought to have inherited at any rate a fraction of their grandmother's notable musical gift. Moreover, on account of his near relationship, he obtained a reduction of fifty per cent. in the price of the lessons—a reduction which she worked off on the boys one by one in the form of showers of abuse, blows on the hands, and complaints to their father of their idleness, leading, of course, to family complications.

It was a continual puzzle to the Lekholm boys how any parents besides their own could have been willing to send their children to such a termagant, such a demon of spite and cruelty. But they did go, partly on account of her reputation as a pianist, partly because the lessons were so cheap, and partly, too, because instruction and bodily pain were in those days, and in certain circles of society, regarded as synonymous; as were also external elegance and physical pain. Just as everyone who wanted to be smart must also be ready to suffer pain, so he or she who wished to be initiated into the intricate and comprehensive mysteries of the piano must resignedly and uncomplainingly submit to bodily and mental torture.

The circumstance which won her what may be called the negative popularity she enjoyed among the adult inhabitants of the town was her attendance at all lyings-in-state, funerals and weddings. The Lekholm boys had heard their father say that she had not been so bad-looking in her youth, that she had even been a rather pretty woman. But her beauty must have been of the kind which requires other nourishment than spinsterhood and piano lessons. As Dr. Holmes, alias Kalle Lekholm, remembered her she was a tall, thin woman with dark, long, thin, strongly marked features and a pair of dark, strangely burning eyes.

Her most conspicuous characteristic, after her ill temper and cruelty to her pupils, was an elegance which excited the envy and ridicule of her fellow-townswomen. Every öre she managed to scrape together by playing at dancing classes and giving lessons was spent on clothes. Once every spring she made a three days' trip to Copenhagen and returned with as many of the season's novelties as her savings allowed her to purchase. There was only one detail of her clothes in which she obstinately refused to follow the fashion. Long after the bustle had ceased to be an integral part of a well-dressed woman's attire, she continued to wear one, having

discovered that it compensated for a certain defect in her figure.

She was everywhere. When anyone in the town—no matter who—lay in state, she was one of the first to arrive at the house of mourning, eagerly studied the expression on the face of the corpse, the grave-clothes and the decoration of the coffin, made a mental note of every word uttered, every tear shed by the relatives, selected the largest and finest sweet from the plate that was handed round, thrust it into her pocket and preserved it at home in the top drawer of her writing-table, which she had turned into a museum of funeral and wedding sweets.

At funerals her sharp elbows were invincible weapons with which to fight her way forward to the place next to the mourners. While the clergyman was casting the three handfuls of soil over the coffin and bidding the departed one rest in peace, Aunt Charlotte stood opposite him scanning the faces of the chief mourners with her burning hawk's eyes. On such occasions she was deaf to all remarks, all sharp words and sarcasms, insensible to all rebukes in the form of elbows thrust into her chest and heels placed on her toes. She was inspired by a passion that knew no obstacles. She must get forward, have one of the best places, must see everything, satisfy her desire.

At private weddings she arrived early and posted herself outside the house to see who had been invited and how they were dressed. She waited patiently in rain and slush on the other side of the street till the time came when the wedding breakfast was over, the lights were lit in the drawing-room windows, and the bridal pair, at the eagerly and loudly expressed desire of the public, appeared in all their finery.

But the red-letter days of her existence were the regretably rare occasions when one of the male or female celebrities of the town was married in church. She was there the

day before, to see the altar and choir being decorated. On the wedding-day itself she was one of the first to arrive, and stood pressed close to the church doors, in order, the moment they were opened, to dash up the nave with her pointed elbows thrust out and secure a place at the end of the pew just behind those reserved for relatives and friends. Her head on its long, thin bird's neck, crowned by a hat with plumage in the latest fashion, was continually bobbing nervously up and down over the edge of the pew.

But she was at all times, in ordinary life, a conspicuous figure in the town. On mornings when she had no piano lessons she was always out and about, in the streets and on the boulevard. She walked very fast, as if endeavouring to escape some pursuer or late for an important appointment. In contrast to her behaviour at weddings and funerals, she was as formal and correct as possible when out walking; she looked straight in front of her, with her head slightly bent forward. It was commonly said that if a young man, particularly an officer, saluted her she turned fiery red and broke into a trot, as if fearing an approach. Impudent school-boys used to take off their caps to her to see if this was true.

The curious thing about her was that, despite her inquisitiveness and love of sensation, she had no confidante, no friends, hardly even acquaintances in the little town where she had been born, gone to school, been confirmed, and lived for nearly forty years. She passed her old school comrades in the street with a curt inflection of her long, skinny neck and a faint malicious smile, in which people saw a monstrous, unjustified consciousness of superiority.

At home, too, she kept to herself as far as was possible in three little rooms and a kitchen, in constant friction with her old parents, each of whom, in different ways, misfortune had turned into a regular eccentric. She was a torment to the two old people, above all through her rigid insistence on her rights. She paid a small sum monthly for board and

lodging, and considered that when this was done she had no further obligation. She refused to help in the kitchen or do any housework or cleaning beyond dusting the parlour, which she regarded as her private room; the lacemaker was only allowed to enter it in the morning, when she was out for her aimless walks.

She was mean, too. She put her savings into the bank till the time of her annual visit to Copenhagen approached; and it was only after a violent altercation that, when times were hard, she could be induced to lend her mother a small sum to meet the most necessary expenses. She spent her spare time devouring novels, which she took out of the lending library every Saturday. Sometimes she even bought a book at the bookseller's with her own money, and jealously locked it up in a drawer of her writing-table.

The mainspring of her life was one single devouring bitterness, a burning hatred of her brother Anders. He had become a bugbear to her. Her family dared not mention his name in her presence for fear of the burning flood of accusation, hate and contempt which, at the thought of Anders, flowed from her lips like lava from a crater. She had the nose of a bloodhound, and despite all efforts at secrecy, she always found out when Uncle Anders had visited his parents in her absence and tried to induce them to intervene with his brother the mathematician with a view to a little financial assistance for himself. Then she came rushing up to the mathematician's wife—she did not dare approach Carl—and unburdened herself:

"So you're going to help him again, the drunken beast! Always him! But what have father and you others done for me? Answer that if you can! No one's troubled about me. No one has thought for a moment what I might have done in the world if I'd gone to the College of Music instead of him. *I* was good enough to play at that concert, when money was to be raised so that he might go to Stockholm

to live a loose life and steal Herr Schulte's waistcoat. But no one thought there was anything in me. You haven't an idea what I could have done on the piano if I'd been sent to the College of Music. You haven't a notion what I've got in here!" (She laid her long, skinny hands on her breast.) "No, you haven't. It's never been me—only him. I shouldn't have boozed and slacked. I'd have worked till a bloody sweat stood on my forehead. How do you know what I couldn't have done, if you'd given one day's thought to my future and my talents? Have you ever heard of a little peasant girl from Småland whose name was Christina Nilsson, and who is now the Countess Casa de Miranda? Or Jenny Lind? I hate him and you and father. And that old Rosenstjerna, who took the drunken beast up. Do you think that if I'd been a common harlot and been willing to pay a certain price, he wouldn't have helped me? Oh yes, I know men!"

The mathematician's wife protested.

"For Heaven's sake be quiet; don't talk so loud. You know the boys are in the next room and can hear every word. You're quite incorrigible."

"Boys! yes, your boys, whom I have to sit and wear myself out over for twelve skilling an hour! But that's nothing to do with it. I know men. Women don't get help in any other way, whatever their gifts may be."

"But you don't mean that Jenny Lind and Christina Nilsson——"

"I only mean what I think. And that's enough. I know men. I've seen through them."

"But you don't mean that Major Rosenstjerna made you—tried—I really don't know how to express it, it's so dreadful to make charges against a dead man! You ought to be ashamed of yourself, Charlotte, that's all I've got to say."

"I don't say he *did*. I only say he *might* have. I know

men and I know they're all alike. Well, that's all I've got to say. Good-bye!"

The Lekholm boys had often overheard these outbursts. Sometimes they ended differently. Suddenly they heard her burst into tears.

"I know, Maria, you think I'm a raw, silly creature. But you don't know what's in my heart. You've done everything you could to suppress it. It can never get out. It only burns and burns inside, inwards. I sometimes feel as if I had a fire in my breast. And I've nobody, nobody I can confide in——"

They heard their mother trying to console her.

"Come, come, Charlotte, make an effort and calm yourself——"

But she only wept.

What Aunt Charlotte had in her head or hidden in the depths of her heart her nearest relations did not know. Nor did anyone else. The mathematician's boys had, as has been mentioned, several times heard their father say that she had been a pretty woman in her youth, and that she could have been married if she had not held her nose so high in the air. And by putting together isolated utterances made on various occasions in the family circle, they discovered that she had really had several admirers in her youth.

One of them in particular, according to what they heard, seemed to have shown a laudable constancy. His name was Carl Jönsson and he had stood behind the counter in Kjellgren's shop. He had certainly, according to what their father said, been as ugly as the devil in those days, red-haired and freckled and squinty-eyed, with white eyebrows and eyelashes; but a pushing, capable, shrewd fellow, with all his wits about him, and a courteous, graceful humorist with a way of treating customers which was equally pleasing to matron and maid, society lady and servant-girl, countryman

and townsman. But when Aunt Charlotte had refused him for the third time, he had got tired of calling on her with large bags of chocolates and mixed sweets, and had invited a girl in Nissalowitz's shop to the next sledging party followed by a dance which the young men of the town used to arrange every New Year's Day. And he had married the girl, too.

He was now, though only forty-five, a man of position, the commercial Napoleon of the town, a town councillor for ten years past, newly elected chairman of the finance committee, a vice-consul and the largest wholesale spirit merchant in the province, with, it was said, a fantastic income. The dinner he gave every winter at the leading hotel to the members of the spirit distillers' association was a regular marvel, both in its arrangements and its consequences. He wore, too, a freemason's ring on the middle finger of his right hand, and had long ago changed his name of Jönsson to the considerably more euphonious Jönzén.

It seemed as if the persistent Carl Jönsson and his perhaps too prosaic advances had left a deep imprint on Aunt Charlotte's mind and had inspired her with a distaste not only for him but for the male sex in general, for love and everything connected with them. It was not only her habit of blushing and stumbling along faster every time a young man took off his hat to her. During the dancing lessons she appeared in the rôle of a self-appointed guardian of morals. As she sat at the piano, playing her repertory of waltzes, polkas, quadrilles, lancers, schottisches and *pas de quatre*, her hawk's eyes swept the room, seeking the slightest occasion to criticize any youth's way of holding his partner. And when the lesson was over, she interrupted any whispers that might be exchanged in the cloak-room between young people of the opposite sexes in whom romance was awakening. When, behind the barricade of overcoats and cloaks, a lad was whispering a halting invitation to the lady of his

heart to come to the pastrycook's with him, or at least to let him escort her home, Charlotte's sharp, bird-like face was suddenly thrust between the coat-hangers:

"What are you two talking about?"

Their knowledge of her unwearied vigilance in matters of the kind gave many mothers a certain feeling of security; they regarded it as an insurance against the romantic inclinations of the young people themselves, and also the more Gallic ideas of propriety held by the dancing master, Herr Lindquist. This difference of view was the cause of frequent and vehement disputes between Charlotte and the dancing master, and these, to her great indignation, were always terminated by Herr Lindquist with the same observation:

"At any rate, mademoiselle, your puritanism doesn't prevent your playing dance music with a passion that could hardly be equalled in any provincial town in Sweden."

Charlotte Lekholm turned crimson.

"You ought to be ashamed of yourself—an old man like you!"

The white-haired old dancing master bowed slightly, smiled his most meaning smile and said with a courtly motion of his right hand:

"Yes, mademoiselle, it's no use at all trying to conceal a thing like that; the music is sure to betray it."

VI

For some ten years before the disaster overtook Aunt Charlotte there had been in the town a young officer who had no sooner arrived than he became the general topic of conversation by reason of his antecedents, his imposing appearance, his debts and his irregular life. His name was Baltzar Rosenstjerna, and he was a distant relation to the violinist,

Major Rosenstjerna, Augusta Lekholm's friend and the unlucky Anders's patron, who was now dead.

He had been compelled to transfer from a Stockholm regiment—in consequence, the rumour went, of a tragic love affair in the very highest circles of the capital. He was believed to be irresistible as a conqueror of female hearts; in fact, his capacities as an officer were less marked than his social talents. The curious thing about him was that, despite his eminence as a seducer, he was as popular among married men as among bachelors, even among those who had to thank him for the horns they were believed to wear.

With an exterior that was a type of manly beauty—the figure of an Apollo (he was said to have the most perfect back in the Swedish army), a Greek head with wavy, shining black hair, thick eyebrows, cold steel-blue eyes, a sensual mouth under a dashing black moustache—he combined a French gentleman's chivalry, an aristocrat's perfect courtesy to high and low, a gentleman's tact, the complete reliability of a man on his oath, the faithfulness and loyalty of a foster-brother, a readiness to help which kept him constantly short of money, and an idle voluptuary's lenient comprehension of the weaknesses of others. In short, he was a real nobleman. Most easily led, and lamentably ill-equipped in the struggle for existence, he had only one weapon at his disposal: he disarmed all his opponents, creditors and deceived husbands, with the quality which is the most unusual of all in the male sex in Sweden—charm.

The tailors, jewellers, grocers and wine merchants, who rang his bell fully determined to deprive him of the very shirt on his body, if he proved to have no other resources at the moment, departed a quarter of an hour later affirming their sincere respect for him and begging to retain his highly valued custom in future. Married men who had asked for a private conversation with him, thirsting for his blood, might be seen the same evening emptying glass after glass

of punch with him at the Stadshotell. He had disarmed them in the same way as his murmuring creditors—by the sincere readiness he displayed to put everything right.

He went into his financial position, generally deplorable, with his creditors in detail, gave figures to show the extent of his indebtedness, the necessity of the expenses he was obliged to incur in the immediate future, and the impossibility of taking the measures desired at the moment. In these discussions it was his genuine sincerity which carried the day. He might, indeed, fairly be called a Casanova at compound interest. The same sincerity, the same readiness to do everything in his power to right the wrong that had been done, was displayed by him when confronted with a deceived husband. Like most other people of little brain, he easily fell into stereotyped ways of speech and action, and it was common knowledge that, in conversation with an injured husband, he always, sooner or later, referred to Ibsen's *Doll's House*, one of the few literary works which some freak of chance had placed in his hands. (His flat in Västra Bulevarden was nicknamed the "Doll's House," though for other reasons.)

He always pointed out to an injured husband that a woman who deceives her husband has some definite reason for doing it, and this is usually to be found in the husband himself. He begged him, if possible, altogether to ignore the unfortunate fact that it was he, Baltzar Rosenstjerna, who in this case had played the serpent's rôle. That was purely a matter of chance. Besides, of what use was moral indignation? What was done could not be undone. The great problem of the moment was to try to prevent a recurrence of the evil. He himself was willing to do everything in his power to assist the husband in this respect. But he must do his best too. Women were sensitive creatures—really nothing more than bundles of nerves.

Having laid down these general principles, he went on

to discuss their practical application. He enlarged, tactfully and discreetly, on the psychology of woman, with special reference to the injured husband's particular reasons for dissatisfaction with his own marriage. Here, too, his tactics were successful, though mainly from a cause he himself did not realize. It was not through his well-intentioned explanations of the theme of *A Doll's House* that he had stilled the deceived one's thirst for blood, but by his sincerity. It had been clearly proved that this much-feared Don Juan regarded the woman he had seduced with complete indifference. It was a triumph for every married man to be able to go home to his wife and declare scornfully:

"That fellow doesn't care a brass farthing for you. He doesn't know what love means. It's only an amusement to him."

It might have been thought that a reputation of the kind, especially as it was probably fully deserved, would quickly have destroyed his prestige as a Don Juan. But there was always some woman daring enough to attempt to pierce his armour of indifference.

Nor was he, really, at bottom, intemperate. But lack of ambition, idleness and the monotony of garrison life had turned him into a hard drinker even for his day and his class, just as, combined with his outward attractions, they had turned him into a Don Juan. It was, unfortunately, by no means an uncommon occurrence for him to go home at night so drunk that he could not distinguish one person from another. It not infrequently happened, therefore, especially during the months of darkness, that he accosted in chivalrous though somewhat fuddled tones solitary women of such an age and appearance that in broad daylight, or when fully sober, he would have confined himself to courteously saluting them. But however completely his power of distinguishing between individuals had deserted him, he never lost his peculiar charm of manner. The mo-

ment he perceived his mistake, he lifted his hand to his cap and expressed his genuine sorrow and profound regret. Aunt Charlotte herself, on her way home from local dances, had several times been accosted by him. And each time she had on the following day, still in a violent state of agitation, tried to persuade her brother the mathematician to speak to Lieutenant Rosenstjerna on the subject.

At half-past ten one January night, when Aunt Charlotte was on her way home from the mathematician's, she suddenly returned, in a state of terror amounting to collapse. For a long time she could not find words to say what had happened to her. It was Lieutenant Rosenstjerna who had insulted her again. She had almost run into his arms at the corner of Lasarettsgatan and Östra Bulevarden. He had staggered towards her, flung his arms round her waist and said something to her—she could not say what he had said. She sat hunched up with her handkerchief to her eyes and swayed to and fro.

She did not dare go home alone that evening; the mathematician had to escort her.

A few years passed.

One morning the little town awoke to find that a tragedy had taken place during the night in the quarters inhabited by Lieutenant Rosenstjerna's most intimate friend, Lieutenant Brockman, the companion of his drinking bouts and his helper in matters of finance. His batman had found him dead in bed, with a revolver-shot through his right temple.

This catastrophe had surrounded Baltzar Rosenstjerna's curly head with a blood-red halo. What would he do now? It was common knowledge that his affairs were more hopelessly involved than ever as the result of his friend's death. It was clear to everyone that he had to choose between suicide and a speedy marriage with a very rich woman. It was an open secret that, the very day on the morning of which

Brockman had been found dead in bed, the colonel had sent for Rosenstjerna and had seriously pointed out to him that his only possible road was to the altar. The prestige of the regiment could not stand another suicide for many years to come. That very morning the colonel had received a number of anxious inquiries from various quarters as to the consequences of Brockman's death for Rosenstjerna.

It was said during the next few days that Rosenstjerna was to get a month's leave, and that some of his brother officers intended to raise a sum of money which would enable him, during that month, to secure a rich fiancée.

But, to the gossips' surprise, he remained in the town, while the tension among his creditors and the other inhabitants increased daily. What did he mean to do? How would he straighten out his affairs? One bill after another was not met. At school every morning the question was asked: Has anyone heard if he's shot himself yet? The waitresses at the hotel brought him his afternoon and evening punch with extravagant adoration; they felt they were serving a man who would soon be a corpse and the centre of a tragedy. And each night, after he had staggered off home, they shed bitter tears in the service-room: would it happen to-night? Rosenstjerna's letter-box, which had always contained plenty of correspondence, was every morning stuffed with envelopes, mostly addressed in a feminine handwriting.

Six weeks after Brockman's death the garrulity of Lindgren, the bank *commissionnaire*, caused the bombshell to explode. In addition to his ordinary avocation, he used to wait at private dinner-parties on special occasions of ceremony, wearing a dress-coat and white cotton gloves. He had been summoned one morning to the house of Consul Jönzén who had engaged him for the next Tuesday evening. There was to be a very grand dinner-party at which the en-

gagement of the Consul's sister Anna and Lieutenant Baltzar Rosenstjerna would be announced. The bank *commissionnaire*, directly the bank was opened the same day, had felt bound to confide the secret to the manager—a retired major—in the words:

"I don't think we need worry much about Lieutenant Rosenstjerna's little bills now, Herr Major. I was at Jönzén's—I beg your pardon, Consul Jönzén's—for a few minutes this morning."

Jönzén! you don't think a sharp fellow like that is going to be fool enough to poke his nose into a wasps' nest!"

"I will only call your attention, Herr Major, to the fact that Consul Jönzén has a sister——"

"What the devil do you mean, Lindgren? You don't mean to say that Rosenstjerna has been *there* too?"

Lindgren only replied, lowering his voice to a mysterious tone and looking round the empty board-room:

"Lieutenant Rosenstjerna and Fröken Anna Jönzén will announce their engagement at a very select dinner-party a week from to-day."

He compressed his lips as though his mouth had been a purse, and, with his head thrown back, read in the major's face the effect of the tidings he had imparted.

The major stared at him in helpless astonishment. At last he said:

"Gracious Heavens above us! How old is she?"

"She's younger that she looks. She is, one might say, in the prime of life—only thirty-three. And perhaps you will remember, Herr Major, that red-haired women retain their youth longer than others. And they always have such pretty, fair complexions. And the Consul has had her well educated, too. He paid for her to train as a national school mistress. And she was one for a few years, till Fru Jönzén died and she went to live in the house."

The major again sat in silence for some time; then he thought aloud:

"What in Heaven's name will his colonel and brother officers say?"

"According to what I gathered from Consul Jönzén, the colonel was to be at the dinner-party."

"What the deuce are you talking about, Lindgren? Borgenschiöld at a family party at the Jönzén's! Please send for the cashier."

Lindgren bowed and disappeared, having first respectfully pointed out that the news had been told him in confidence by Consul Jönzén. The major waved his hands:

"I understand, I understand! Send the cashier here!"

Work was stopped in every home in the town for at least an hour that afternoon, as the report spread from house to house. And during the next few days too the consumption of coffee was, the grocers stated, abnormally large. There had never been such a *mésalliance* in the regiment's history. It was true that a few years back a lieutenant had married a waitress at the Stadshotell. But that was quite another thing—thoughtlessness, or romance, or whatever one liked to call it. But a lieutenant who married a middle-aged schoolmistress whose brother was said to have eighty thousand kronor a year could not be called thoughtless or romantic. What a squalid *dénouement* to a drama which had promised to offer sensations of a really high order—a revolver-shot or the sudden apparition of a fairy princess! A red-haired schoolmistress was not the angel excited imaginations had expected to see float down in the nick of time. Such a way out as this indicated a lack of resource in Baltzar Rosentjerna still more lamentable than his monstrous financial debts and deficits.

People had thought him capable of something better than this. And now he had been hopelessly shown up as a common humbug. When the first wave of surprise was over,

they could not even feel sorry for him. His fall was as swift as that of a swindler exposed by a crash.

It may be observed parenthetically that Fru Rosenstjerna, within a few years, had acquired a lasting popularity in the highest society of the town. Not only did she possess the ordinary feminine adaptability, but with her abundance of natural talents she combined a red-haired woman's wit, readiness and cheerful vitality. As for Baltzar Rosenstjerna, he proved, to the general astonishment, an ideal and perfectly faithful husband, and became in the public estimation nothing more than the brainless *charmeur* which, at bottom, he had always been. He kept his beautiful figure, however, till he died of apoplexy at the age of fifty-five.

What Aunt Charlotte thought of Rosenstjerna's engagement, or whether she thought anything about it at all, no one knew and, as she had no friends or confidants, no one asked her. The engagement might, as far as she was concerned, have given rise to sundry reflections of the kind people are so fond of indulging in. If she had not refused Carl Jönsson, she would now have been sitting as hostess at Rosenstjerna's wedding feast, assuming she had not died of consumption like the real Fru Jönzén—and there was no reason why she should have done that, seeing that there was no tuberculosis in the Lekholm family. She would, in brief, have become Rosenstjerna's sister-in-law *if* she had married Jönsson and *if* Rosenstjerna in the circumstances had had the opportunity of making Anna Jönzén's acquaintance, which perhaps would not have been the case, for Consul Jönzén would then have needed no housekeeper, there being no tuberculosis in Aunt Charlotte's family.

Whether these reflections occupied her at this time there was, as has been said, no one who knew. Nor was there anyone in the town who in his wildest nightmares could have imagined the rôle she was going to play at the wedding.

Even without Aunt Charlotte's co-operation the wedding

could not have failed to be talked of for years. It contained so many picturesque elements which could not fail to make it a striking spectacle. There was, for example, Consul Jönzén, who was to appear for the first time in his uniform as a Danish consul, made in Copenhagen by the tailor to the Danish diplomatic corps. There were the bride's old father and mother—Anders Jönsson Glad, formerly a dragoon, now the owner of a villa at Härsjö, and Nilla his wife, who were to sit in the front pew along with the representatives of the Rosenstjerna, Gyllenschantz and Borgenschiöld families. The whole of the officers' corps was there in full dress uniform; the governor of the province in all his splendour, accompanied by the countess; judges and officials of the court of justice, headed by the president; the mayor, the whole of the town council, and the regimental band, which was to play Mendelssohn's wedding march from up in the organ-loft. What a feast for the eyes, and what exercise for the neck!

As the bride and bridegroom were to leave by the 3.50 train, the wedding began at one o'clock. It was reckoned that it would be over an hour later, when Consul Jönzén was giving a big luncheon at the Stadshotell for two hundred persons at twenty kronor a head. The church was crammed with guests and curious spectators—among the latter, of course, Aunt Charlotte, wearing a felt hat with gull's wings in it. She had stationed herself at an early hour at the church door, where she had defended her position with bravery and endurance against ill-mannered competitors, her face pressed against the apostle Peter on the church door and her bustle acting as a buffer to meet the hardest blows. She had been the first to enter the church when the verger opened the door from inside, and, thrust forward by the surging wave of humanity, she had reached the place which she desired, and which she generally secured at weddings.

The regimental chaplain took up his position in front of

the altar to the strains of the march from *Tannhäuser*, and immediately after the bridal procession entered. There were no bridesmaids or groomsmen, mainly on account of the difficulty of finding suitable bridesmaids among the bride's intimate acquaintances. The opening psalm had been sung, the clergyman had read his exhortation to "dear Christians," and paused a moment for the sake of effect. Then he cleared his throat, raised and lowered the service book several times, and began in a loud, sonorous voice:

"Before God the All-knowing and in the presence of this congregation I ask thee, Hubert Baltzar Dieudonné Rosenstjerna, if thou wilt have Anna Mathilda Jönzén to be thy wedded wife and love her in sorrow and in happiness."

No one could hear whether Lieutenant Rosenstjerna answered the clergyman's question. Presumably he did. At the moment when the chaplain, smiling amiably at the bridegroom, lowered his book in expectation of an answer—at that moment and in the short pause which followed his question—a hoarse cry, a woman's rending shriek, rose from one of the pews:

"No—o—o! no—o—o!"

The cry echoed in the vaulted roof; and then there was silence, dead silence. It was as if the whole congregation had been turned to stone. No one moved. No one dared to move. No one turned his head to see where the cry came from; no one farther back stood up. There was silence, dead silence. To all who were not sitting quite close to the woman who had uttered the cry it seemed to be the utterance of a spirit, forbidding the scandal which was about to be sanctioned by Holy Church under the eyes of the bleeding Saviour over the altar.

The clergyman had turned as white as chalk. He cleared his throat afresh, raised and lowered the book again, and said:

"Before God the All-knowing and in the presence of this

congregation I ask thee, Hubert Baltzar Dieudonné Rosenstjerna, if thou wilt have Anna Mathilda Jönzén to be thy wedded wife and love her in sorrow and in happiness."

Lieutenant Rosenstjerna's reply was again inaudible. The clergyman was looking past him, staring, petrified with terror, at a fashionably dressed woman who at that moment had risen from a seat in the body of the church and was rushing towards the altar.

It was Aunt Charlotte.

Again no one tried to stop her. The congregation sat huddled up in their pews, shrank into themselves in horror at the appalling scene. She reached the altar rails unhindered, flung herself at the bridegroom's feet and screamed: "No, no, Baltzar, don't do it, don't sell yourself! You don't love her!"

She had seized Lieutenant Rosenstjerna's right trouser-leg in both hands. Like the gentleman he was, he endeavoured to free himself by moving his leg backwards and forwards. The bride did not even look down at Charlotte. She stared straight in front of her and swayed gently to and fro as if trying to keep her balance.

At this critical moment only one person in the whole congregation had his wits about him; and that was Consul Jönzén. As soon as he had collected himself and realized who the woman was, he was beside her at the altar in three steps, like the active grocer's lad he had once been, bent down, put his arms round her waist, that female waist he had once so often and so fervently desired to encircle, and whispered:

"Lotte! Lotte! Get up at once and go away!"

Aunt Charlotte was on her legs as though worked by a spring, put both her hands against his chest and pushed him away in disgust.

"You, you shopkeeper, you spirit merchant—you—you—help me, Baltzar, help me!"

Consul Jönzén had taken her by the waist and was holding her so tight with his short bear's arms that her body was bent back as though she were wrestling. By now several young officers had reached the spot, and by their united efforts the poor woman was carried out of the church. She defended herself as best she could—biting, tearing, scratching, kicking.

It was a madwoman, with her clothes half torn from her body, who was finally carried out of the church, put into one of the waiting landaus, driven to the hospital and thrust into a strait-waistcoat.

The same evening the horrified Lekholm family sat in conclave at the mathematician's; the lacemaker, his Augusta, the musician, now for some years a wearer of the blue ribbon, and his Hulda. Both Uncle Anders and she had witnessed with their own eyes the harrowing incident in the church, Anders from the organ-loft and Hulda from one of the pews.

The event was still too recent to be regarded in any other light than that of the appalling scandal involved. Aunt Charlotte had by her conduct, which grandmamma Augusta declared "no sane person could have dreamed of," set a stain upon the name of Lekholm which it would take years to wipe out. Grandmamma for her part felt that the sooner the gravedigger made ready her last resting-place the better. She didn't see how she could show herself at the market on Wednesdays and Saturdays after this. If there had been a merciful God, He would have let her sink into the earth rather than expose her to this disgrace in her old age. She wondered what she had done to deserve the hard fate that had been hers. What grievous sins had she committed that the Almighty in His all-wisdom should thus have sent her one severe trial after another, ever since she had exchanged her honourable, universally respected name of Töpfer for

that of Lekholm? It was as though that name were under a curse.

And now she could bear it no longer. Now she would only, in all humility but none the less insistently, beg the Lord to let His servant depart in peace. She had had enough of it! All those years in which Lekholm, the fool, had still been in what was called his full manhood, and had made her and her family the laughing-stock of the town! All those years in which Anders by his drunkenness had brought disgrace and misery on himself and his family! And hardly had he begun to live a sober, respectable life, when this had come like a bolt from a cloudless sky! And what would happen next? She could not believe it was the last of *this* in the history of her own and her family's sufferings. The years had taught her a great deal, and her accumulated wisdom had convinced her that so long as one Lekholm breathed and had his being on earth, he could never be free from sorrows and misfortunes. "Truly, O Lord, I have had enough of this vale of tears," she concluded.

The mathematician, like the man of action he was, had visited the hospital doctor that afternoon to ascertain his opinion of the cause of the outbreak and its probable duration. The doctor did not believe that she would recover, at any rate for a very long time. As for the cause of the outbreak, he would only point out that a large percentage of insane women were spinsters. He was not, however, a specialist on the subject, and knew too little of this particular case and its antecedents to be able to give any definite opinion. The best thing would be for her to be taken to the asylum at Lund and shut up there.

The mathematician's wife maintained that the appalling outbreak was the result of long suffering borne in silence, nourished and stimulated by bad novels. But grandmamma Augusta was of quite a different opinion. Charlotte had always been difficult, even ill-natured. But no one was go-

ing to tell her that Charlotte had not been *sane*—a person so precise in her ways and so mean and grasping in money matters. No, she had always been in her right mind, there could be no doubt of that. It was just the *suddenness* of the outbreak which was so typically Lekholmian; just to rush ahead without the slightest thought or reflection, without caring what misery one was causing. If that was not the Lekholms all over, she had been married to a Lekholm for forty-two years blindfolded. She, for her part, could see no great difference between what had happened in church that day and what Lekholm had done one night Heaven knew how many years ago, when he came home and half killed Lina Lind because he wanted beefsteak and onions. Hadn't he kicked and hit out all round when those friends of his (a nice lot they were) had tried to quiet him? Oh, no, it was a regular bit of Lekholmery, what had happened. *But she was sick to death of the Lekholms and all their ways.*

Three weeks after the wedding Lieutenant and Fru Rosenstjerna returned from Paris, where they had spent their honeymoon. One of the lieutenant's first acts was to call on the mathematician and ask after his sister. He wondered if it would be suitable to send her a bunch of roses as a sign that neither he nor his wife bore her any grudge whatever, but only hoped that she might speedily be restored to health and peace of mind.

"And there's something else I wanted to ask you, sergeant-major. I beg that you won't think me in any way indiscreet. The fact is, I've been thinking about it all the time I've been away."

He took an envelope from his tunic pocket and showed it to the mathematician.

"Do you by any chance know this handwriting?"

"Yes, I think so. It's my sister's."

Lieutenant Rosenstjerna nodded gravely once or twice.

"I thought it might possibly be her. The idea came to me on the train to Paris. I suddenly thought: it may be *her*! The fact is that for a few years past I've received a great many anonymous letters in that handwriting. I've racked my brains to discover who could have written them—guessed this person and that. And as they are so unusual I have kept practically all of them, except the first, which, as I usually do, I tore up and threw into the wastepaper-basket. But I kept these letters because I soon found out that they were of particular value, I mean *literary* value. I've often thought they ought to be printed and published as a book, they were so well-written and interesting. But now I'd like to hand the letters over to her relations, because I consider that they belong to them and not to me. Will you take them, sergeant-major?"

But the mathematician would not take them. It was no concern of the family what his sister had written to Lieutenant Rosenstjerna, and in any case it was of no help as regarded her illness. He would be grateful if the lieutenant would burn them, so that they would be destroyed for good and all. Lieutenant Rosenstjerna promised to burn them, after pointing out once more that in his opinion they deserved a better fate. There were certain pages which, still in his private opinion, were superior to *A Doll's House*.

But not even this high estimate could induce the mathematician to alter his decision. And so Aunt Charlotte's letters, written in fire, were committed to the flames.

VII

It was not long before Anders Lekholm made himself an esteemed member of the Good Templars' lodge. It may almost be said that he did so in face of the strong prejudice of

the other brethren. The reformation of so confirmed a drunkard could, of course, occasion only rejoicing, although the immediate cause of his reformation was hardly such as to make him an acquisition to the lodge from an ideal standpoint. The fact was that the lodge was too young, its message had not yet secured a firm enough hold of the public ear, for it to be able safely to admit such a monster bass of drunkenness to its, for all its enthusiasm, feeble orchestra.

There were even, the mathematician learned, various members who held that the temperance movement in the town, which had so much prejudice to contend with, must above all things see that its own members did not involve it in unnecessary ridicule, and that for that very reason Uncle Anders's identification with the gospel of sobriety was not particularly desirable in view of the contemptuous mockery which would inevitably be the immediate consequence. A veto of the kind, however, was opposed to both the spirit and the rules of the order. Anders Lekholm was admitted to the "Well done" lodge with the secret reservation that an especially sharp eye should be kept on his goings and comings. Further, it was made a condition that his wife should take the pledge at the same time, a proposal to which she agreed with the same rather lukewarm readiness with which she had accepted so many other suggestions much less beneficial to herself.

The shortness of the time in which Anders Lekholm acquired the confidence and esteem of his new brethren is clear proof of the wealth of his resources.

The cause of his rapid victory over mistrust and dislike was not, as might have been supposed, his friendliness, his irresistible good humour, his childlike innocence, or his skill in playing on a variety of instruments. If he had set out to win over the brethren of the order by his brilliant social gifts, it is probable that he would have had a freezing reception. They would at once have made it clear to him that the

order of the Good Templars, as a serious body, had no use for convivial humour and tavern tricks.

Anders Lekholm won his brethren's respect and affection in quite another way—a manner which, if his mentality had contained any element of calculation, would at once have assured him a place among the masters of psychology. He overcame all resistance simply by his fanaticism in the cause of temperance, the violence with which he championed total abstinence, the burning hate with which he denounced the devastating effects of drink on the individual, the family, the community, the State. If the order had demanded such a sacrifice of him, he would, in his ecstatic moments of enthusiasm, hardly have hesitated to commit a "temperance *hara-kiri*" in order to demonstrate the drinker's liver which, according to the ideas of the time, was the drunkard's distinguishing characteristic.

His fanaticism, to which he gave expression by ceaseless coffee-drinking at a little temperance café, where the brethren discussed their affairs between meetings, was extended to the recruiting of proselytes. He succeeded, for example, in converting—for a time—his friend Jocke, his fellow-musician and former paying-guest. He went so far in his zeal as to point out to his brother the mathematician the perils to which the latter was exposing himself, his family, the community and the State by drinking a *schnaps* at dinner on Sundays and consuming one or two toddies on Church and civil festivals announced in the almanac—Christmas, Easter, Whit-Sunday, midsummer day and Martinmas. This attempt at conversion was one of the few occasions when the mathematician's sons heard their father laugh loudly and heartily.

Anders Lekholm's social gifts were not realized by the lodge till somewhat later. And then, to be quite correct, only one side of them found appreciation. His fanatical contempt for those who had not yet realized the destructive

effects of alcohol had buried the lighter side of his sociable nature. Gone were the shouts of delighted laughter, the carelessness for the morrow, the love of pranks, the military songs, the pencil and front-teeth impromptus—all these had been banished by the abstainer's crushing seriousness. But the lyre was still in his soul, and its strings were continually stirred by the burning winds of fanaticism. He called to life the musical talent in the lodge which hitherto had slumbered undisturbed, and in some degree realized the dream of his own youth and still more his parents—that he might control the waves of sound baton in hand. He formed a men's quartette in the lodge which in the course of years grew to the dimensions of a small choir. Besides this, he used to play a few violin solos at lodge festivities.

Thus a new epoch had opened in Uncle Anders's life. The transformation within began gradually to be reflected in his outward appearance. The blue veins, swollen with alcohol, became less conspicuous; he could even be said to be on the way to recovering his complexion; his eyes grew less bloodshot, and his stomach slowly grew smaller as a frozen snow hillock melts under the May sun. But it did not disappear entirely owing to the large consumption of sugar entailed by continual coffee-drinking.

Some readers, even those experienced in treading the labyrinths of psychology, may perhaps be astonished at the sudden revelation of a fanatic's gloomy temper and religious enthusiasm in so thorough a hedonist as Uncle Anders. This circumstance, over which his nephew the doctor had often reflected, could, as a matter of fact, be quite naturally explained by the two qualities which, along with his hedonism, were the principal elements of his character—his optimism and his impatience. These three qualities combined were the fuel which made his enthusiasm for everything new blaze up like a beacon.

The rôle played by these three elements was probably somewhat as follows: his hedonism demanded better fortune, more comfort, better economic conditions, and a higher measure of physical well-being; his optimism told him that all these things could be gained by pursuing the new road on which he had set his feet, especially as his previous way of life had been proved to lead in the opposite direction; lastly, his impatience demanded that this change should take place as quickly as possible. Hence the amazing initial velocity with which he flung himself into his new rôle; he told himself that the more quickly he could get over the first stage, painful both bodily and mentally (the three weeks in the cells had in some degree facilitated this), the sooner he would reach the goal which his hedonism, his optimism and his impatience together made him certain of reaching.

It was, therefore, in the nature of things that the time should be none too distant when he was compelled to arrive at a most depressing conclusion—that he had been largely mistaken. It was certainly true that after a year and a half's abstinence from strong drink there was a decided improvement in his physical condition. Certain afflictions which before his conversion had obstinately reminded him of the perversity of his manner of living—an unrefreshed feeling when he awoke, a giddiness when called upon to exercise his brain, a more or less noticeable trembling of the hands, which could not be cured by any other remedy than a few morning pick-me-ups—had all disappeared.

But this increased bodily vigour had no counterpart in an increased mental activity. Anders Lekholm found himself gradually driven to the curious but no less serious discovery that he had nothing to feel fit and healthy for. On the contrary: the unrefreshed feeling with which, under the former régime, he had faced the day and its duties corresponded

more faithfully to the realities of his life than this new bodily vigour.

The miscalculation his three fundamental characteristics had induced him to commit made itself felt most quickly on the economic side. It soon became clear that his new way of life in no way improved his financial position. It could even be said to have become worse. Not, of course, if reckoned in cold prosaic figures. Coffee, in however large quantities it was consumed, was and remained cheaper than brandy and other spirits. But Anders Lekholm, in the course of years, had managed to accumulate very considerable debts for his modest means. And his new life did not contribute in any degree worth mentioning to the discharge of these debts. All his calculations brought him to the same conclusion; it was painfully clear to him that it would take years to get rid of them—years of economy and sobriety.

In this connection he made another very serious discovery; his new, orderly way of life was, rather than a help, a direct obstacle to the discharge of these debts. The explanation of this curious fact is not far to seek. It is simply this—that one is more likely to succeed in a request for a small temporary loan in a tavern, among cheery companions and full glasses, than in a temperance café, with a cup of coffee in one hand and a roll in the other. And even if, before his conversion, he had not always been successful in negotiating loans, he had always been able to soften a refusal and the pain it caused him by a drop more brandy in his coffee or another glass of toddy. And then life had smiled on him again.

But now it was no longer so. Now a debt had become just a debt, an obligation an obligation, settlement day settlement day. A creditor can treat a drunkard with a good deal of leniency, if—as actually was the case—he is shaped in the same mould as himself. He unconsciously takes into

consideration the fact that he has had a good deal of his money back in the form of the imponderabilia of human intercourse—pleasure, laughter and fun, violin-playing and the Swedish army tattoo performed on the front-teeth. But of a person who, so to speak, has emptied the safe of pleasure, he demands punctuality and ready cash.

Life and creditors are like that.

In the dilemma in which he found himself, refused the help he needed by both old and new associates, Anders Lekholm had no choice but to turn to his brother the mathematician. It was *he* who had forced him to join the lodge. It was, therefore, in a sense *his* duty now to try to help him out of the blind alley into which he had got, with his nose up against an insurmountable wall.

In conversation with him, Anders Lekholm broached the fundamental question of the utility of the temperance movement to anyone with a past like his. He declared it to be his unshakable opinion, based on experience, that when anyone took the pledge the Good Templars' lodge ought to undertake to pay the new brother's debts. Otherwise all the talk of conversion and a new life was only a qualified truth. A new life meant, or ought to mean, at least as he understood, a *new* life in which a man ought not to have to bear the grievous burden of his past.

And he added:

"In the old days, when things were all wrong, one could have a glass or two and feel happy for a few minutes at least. But one can't do that now."

With his quick grasp of a situation, the mathematician immediately perceived the temptation to which the musician was exposed, and the necessity of endeavouring to prevent a relapse. And together with their elder brother, Per, he undertook to try to straighten out the tangle Anders had made of his finances.

In other words, Uncle Anders was placed under financial

control. The sums to be controlled were certainly not large, but the step, while in itself necessary, was strong enough to make the musician feel that he was no longer a citizen of a free, constitutional kingdom.

The severe blow which had been dealt to Uncle Anders's impatience was, however, only a first instalment, which was followed by others. His sober vision now perceived something which hitherto he had never been willing to look at seriously—the future. But now it stood there before him—not a single dark, menacing figure, past which it might be possible to slip by some feint or by a lucky chance, but the whole gloomy prospect which was in store for himself and his family.

It was, in other words, the naked, sober truth that stared him in the face. The future! What had he to expect in the future? He could hardly count on getting many more private violin and monster bass lessons. He could not expect any outside earnings beyond those he had made by playing at concerts or when operetta companies came to the town; his conversion to a sober and decent life had not made these occasions any more frequent. Nor could he ever rise higher than sergeant; he had been in the cells too often ever to be promoted to sergeant-major. In ten years or so he would retire with a pension of five or six hundred kronor.

That was his future, and his children's too.

Even for anyone with his lack of economic sense it was clear that he would under no circumstances be able to give them an education suited to their, in his opinion, indisputable talents. His eldest girl, Augusta Seraphia, was now sixteen. She had, again in his opinion, been endowed by nature with a voice in which there was a gold mine. There was no question that she had before her the brilliant future of a Jenny Lind or a Christina Nilsson, if only she could be given the opportunity of being properly trained. But this he could not possibly give her. And as no one in the town,

except his wife, seemed to share his view of his daughter's capacities, he was obliged, to his great distress, when she had reached the age at which she must earn her living, to send her into Anna Larsson's tailoring establishment as an errand girl.

He really began to feel like Jephthah, judge of Israel, who had been compelled to sacrifice his daughter, but a Jephthah who would never in his life, by way of compensation, attain the exalted position of judge.

Next to Augusta came Hulda Zuleima. She, too, had a nice voice—really, perhaps, prettier than Augusta Seraphia's; certainly it had more expression in it, and was richer, though of course she was still too young for any definite opinion to be pronounced. In any case he could swear that he had never in his life met a human being so genuinely musical as Hulda Zuleima. And it would presumably be her lot, too, when the time came, to be put behind a counter.

Then there were the boys. Four of them, since the youngest had died of whooping-cough. They would never, despite his repeated assurances and frequent threats, outstrip the mathematician's boys, all four of whom were at the elementary school and were to go to the university. He did not believe for a moment that they had any particular ability. But their father drove them up the school, and every term they came home with good reports for grandpapa and grandmamma to examine through their spectacles. Well, time would show how they were going to turn out. They had not rowed far from the land so far, and the third boy, Sven, did not (Anders was glad to note) promise to become a model young man.

No, neither he nor any other mortal could foretell their future. But the future, whatever it might be, was traceable in the present. The social cleavage between the cousins became more and more marked as the years passed, not only

in their dress, but also in their interests. The mathematician's boys already belonged to another class, and it had even happened that in the fights between the pupils of the elementary school and those of the national school the cousins had stood face to face armed with bars of lead and leather straps.

If, at this period of his life, Anders Lekholm could have achieved his dearest wish by a stroke of magic, he would have abolished the matriculation. Or he would have abolished it for the Lekholm family. In his opinion matriculation at the university had been the family's special curse from the beginning, and was so now in a higher degree than ever. For all the torment and feeling of humiliation he now had to suffer daily, when he thought that his own boys would never wear the white cap, "the old man," as he called his old father, was to blame. It was the old man who in his pride had expected more from his sons than other fathers in his position. Why could not Anders and his brothers have been allowed to grow up like other boys, without its being everlastingly dinned into their ears that they were destined for something quite remarkable and conspicuous in life? How could the old man know beforehand what they were going to do? What grounds had he for his expectations? He could not himself be accused of being a genius, a clever business man, or indeed of possessing any capacity at all except for talking big.

Strictly speaking, the old man had never had more than one idea in all his life. That idea was that his sons should go to the university. And then he himself had made it impossible for any of them to go. And yet he sat in his chair now and twisted his thumbs out of joint and lamented that his boys had not got on in the world as he had hoped. Why should he, Anders Lekholm, be made to feel himself a failure and a disgrace because he was not a bandmaster? None of the other regimental bandsmen considered himself

a failure because he was not a bandmaster. Except for one or two who were harassed by debt, they were cheery musicians, contented with their lot.

But the worst of it was that the old man's idea had taken root in the mathematician's mind, and that rock of obstinacy seemed, curiously enough, to have been the soil in which the old man's fantastic ideas took as firm root as bindweed and grew into trees visible for miles round, encouraging attempts at cultivation in other quarters, too, where the soil was just as poor. In other words: the mathematician's effort to make his sons' education the main object of his life, and subordinate everything else to this ambition, had not only attracted his comrades' attention, but had served as a model. Within the memory of man, no non-commissioned officer in the regiment had thought of putting his sons in a position to obtain the white cap by his own unaided resources, and sending them to the university. That had hitherto been regarded as outside the bounds of possibility; a non-commissioned officer's pay was altogether too low. But Carl Lekholm had resolved to make it possible. And his comrades, knowing his firmness of will and unquenchable vigour, were convinced that if he never saw his boys at the top of the tree it would not be his fault.

It was an infectious example; it awoke the best and most vital elements among his comrades from the indifference which arises from the consciousness that, however hard one tries, one *can* get no farther in the world; it inspired them to fifteen or twenty years of effort, and created within the non-commissioned officers' corps an aristocracy which meant to and would get something out of life, not for themselves, but for their children. It was as if Carl Lekholm had looked into his comrades' eyes with his keen, serious gaze and put to them the unspoken question: have you the will and the strength to put your own interests and desires on one side in order to give your son a future?

More and more followed his example.

But his brother Anders was not one of them. And now, when he was confronted by the sober, unadorned reality, he saw that his conversion had come too late in his life. He could do nothing to assist his children's education. Despite his wealth of natural talent he was still a pariah. And for the feeling of shame this caused him he had, in a way, to thank his own brother.

But there was one field in which, for all his humiliation, he could outstrip his brother; and that was his music. He had composed before, certainly many years before, but the musical creative power is one of God's gifts, which one either has or has not, and of which no power in the world can deprive one. But now, when his affairs had ceased to be chaotic and he no longer felt physically below the mark, the time had come for concentration and serious work.

He had, indeed, a task to fulfil.

The fact was, that immediately after his admission into the order he had had the idea of composing for "The International Order of Good Templars" a march, to whose strains the brethren and sisters should march when they went out with waving banners to a coffee party in the country or held a ceremonial procession. It was to be a march full of joy, cheerfulness and faith, a crashing hymn of temperance to the forces of good in life which originated in temperance. He had imagined it something in the style of "Glad as a bird." It must not, of course, on any account be a plagiarism, or even an imitation, but it must certainly have something of its seething youth, its joyous enthusiasm.

Unfortunately, Uncle Anders had not been able to preserve this idea as a secret in the depths of his own and his family's heart till the time had come when he could send it out, fully instrumented, as a triumph-song of temperance throughout the land and—why not?—the world. He had,

on the contrary, often hinted that he was thinking of something of the kind at the café where the brethren emptied their coffee-cups. And now a grand lodge meeting was to be held at Malmö in a few months. Did he think he could finish it by then? It would be a triumph for "Well done."

Anders Lekholm promised.

Every afternoon he went to the barracks and sat down alone at the piano in the regimental music-room. He fingered the notes, looking into space, with his head on one side. He played with them as a man plays who seeks to conjure forth the shy nymph Inspiration, struck up a few experimental harmonies. . . .

But nothing came of it. He looked down at the notes, wrinkled his forehead and said aloud to himself:

"This is the very devil! Can't I compose either, now?"

But that was no help at all.

Well, he thought, after all it was natural that he should not get into the way of it at once, seeing how long it was since he had done anything of the kind. It wasn't worth worrying about; he would try again next day.

But next day it was just the same. He fingered the notes, played the first tentative harmonies—and came to a dead stop!

"This is the deuce!" he exclaimed. "Can't I even compose a Good Templars' march—I, who have had so many waltzes and polkas in the bookshop window?"

But not even this allusion to his previous fortunate encounters with Inspiration could draw her to the piano. The result was and remained nil.

"This is the very devil!"

But they were no longer the words of one who is kept waiting for an appointment. They rose, slow and reflective, from a heart which in the past year had had to endure many disappointments, of which this last was the most bitter. There was tragedy in the words. What had been the use

of this new, sober life, if now this was to come, on the top of all his other disillusionments? What was the use of it? Had he by his drunken way of life flung away the last and sole possibility of improving his position? Was there nothing left but dull, grey reality for a fellow like him to grow cold and old and die in?

And what sort of a reality was it? A poor home with shabby furniture all in holes. A wife who never combed her hair unless she happened to be going on some errand, and who was losing her teeth from constant pregnancy and neglect. Children who were going out into the world to make their way as best they could. That was the reality he was to grow old in. Could he bear it without music?

Anders Lekholm's temperance march, dedicated to "The International Order of Good Templars," *was* completed in time. It was played at the lodge meeting at Malmö. But it had been created under the influence of strong drink obtained through Jocke, who had broken the pledge several months earlier, and consumed by the musician in secret.

It was a real success. It made his name known at once in all the lodges from Ystad to Haparanda.

VIII

But even without this success it would not have been long before Uncle Anders came to occupy not merely a respected, but a prominent position in the lodge. He had passed quickly through the lower stages, and, had he wished, could certainly have risen much higher. But he had no craving for power, had no desire whatever to exercise an influence over his fellow-men or play any part among them beyond that of a man of superior gifts. He belonged to the type common in Sweden which prefers being thought capable of doing great

things to actually doing them. His romantic temperament contained too much egotism for him to be able to interest himself heart and soul in a general cause and make sacrifices for it. In this respect he was like the war poet who urges his brethren to battle from his armchair. The fanaticism he had displayed from the very start, the dizzy rapidity with which he had flung himself into the new life, were due entirely to his eagerness to get through an unbearable intermediate stage as quickly as possible. The fundamental principles of the temperance movement left him cold and indifferent.

It was the brethren of the order and not he himself who conferred on him the prominent position he came to assume in the lodge. His glowing enthusiasm had caused them to draw, quite comprehensibly, the conclusion that the man was much better than his reputation. And as often happens in a case of the kind, they went further and concluded that Anders Lekholm was a man who had been led to soil himself in the nauseous puddle of drunkenness only by the unpleasant circumstances of his life; when he had been washed clean he proved to be a man without spot or blemish.

His prestige was naturally increased by his musical gifts, which, in a movement fond of string and wind instruments, was bound to make him an extremely useful recruit, even if he had proved not entirely reliable in the matter of the pledge. With the reputation the march had brought both to him and the "Well done" lodge, the way was straight for his march to the stars.

The success had a notable influence, too, on Anders Lekholm's personal prosperity. Not only, after many years of dissipation, degradation and collapse, had he reached the position he had once occupied as a lad—a man of great possibilities, of whom all kinds of things might be expected in the future. The march brought him in a certain amount of money, by no means to be despised by a man in his modest

circumstances. It was printed, "dedicated to The International Order of Good Templars by Brother Anders Lekholm." It was regularly advertised in the *Reformer*, and sold at a generous discount to lodges all over the country. Uncle Anders had thus acquired a small source of revenue, the existence of which was unknown to his two trustees, his brothers Per and Carl, until several years afterwards.

His success, however, and the additional income it brought him, had provided Uncle Anders with the material for a vicious circle from which he was never to escape. The manner in which he became more and more fatally entangled must already be clear to the reader. The undertakings he had given as a temperance composer must be kept; to summon up the necessary mood of exaltation he was obliged to make use of artificial means of inspiration, that is, alcohol; and the means to purchase alcohol he obtained by the additional income from his compositions, which included a number of temperance songs with words taken from the *Reformer*.

Only two persons shared with him the secret of this new *modus vivendi*, which satisfied in every respect different sides of his mentality, and enabled him to combine the respect of his fellow-men with a moderate amount of private indulgence. The initiates were his wife and the renegade Jocke, who purchased the spirits necessary for composition in return for a percentage of the proceeds. As for Hulda Lekholm, it is unlikely that Uncle Anders had any difficulty in convincing her of the rectitude of his compromise between a sacred pledge and an obligation as an artist. As an ex-waitress at Berggren's tavern she held peculiarly liberal and lenient views in the matter.

The difficulty of the new arrangement, as Jocke pointed out with accuracy and vigour, was that he could not go out and amuse himself in the town when the drink-inflamed spirit demanded a broader horizon, a wider field of activity

than was afforded within the four walls of the composer's home.

The keeping of the secret, however, was greatly facilitated by Aunt Charlotte's misfortune. When it became clear that her recovery would take a long time, Uncle Anders proposed that the piano should be moved to his house, where he was in urgent need of such an instrument for his work.

"One can't rush off to barracks every time one has an idea," he said.

Old Fru Lekholm let him take the piano. She herself had not touched it for a long time. Years and misfortunes had broken her, and she shrivelled visibly each winter. It was in a way a relief to her to get rid of the piano. She only hoped it might give more pleasure in its new abode than it had given during the decades for which it had stood in her home. She had made one discovery in life, on which she never wearied of enlarging in one form or another:

"Music and the Lekholms don't agree. A musical Lekholm causes nothing but trouble. Look at Charlotte! And look at yourself, Anders! The only Lekholms who do well are those who can't tell the 'Marseillaise' from the 'Wacht am Rhein.' Look at Per! Look at Carl! Take the piano home if you like! I only hope it won't do even more harm where it's going!"

Old Fru Lekholm had no idea of the extent to which her premonitions were justified.

IX

A few years passed—three or perhaps four—Dr. Holmes, alias Kalle Lekholm, could not say exactly. Happiness has no history, and the period of uneventfulness and relative freedom from care which was granted by fate to the Lek-

holm family, after Aunt Charlotte's misfortune, he was able to measure, many years later and in a strange *milieu*, only by the monotonous succession of the school terms and the changes of the seasons.

But there came an autumn in which his elder brother had only one year left before his matriculation, and he himself was in the upper sixth.

All that spring and summer Uncle Anders had been in a mood which, while it cannot be said that it caused his relations any great anxiety—in the Lekholm family the various members' moods did not cause immediate anxiety—had on many occasions given rise to brief comments. Old granny maintained that he quite certainly "had something on his mind, whatever it might be," while the mathematician for his part could not deny that Anders of late had "had his tail between his legs."

One cause of the musician's depression may have been the gossip which connected his eldest daughter's name with that of a certain young lieutenant stationed in the town. Augusta Seraphia had become an assistant in Carin Andersson's tailoring establishment in Västra Storgatan, where she served the town's more or less gilded youth and middle-age with sartorial novelties from Copenhagen and Berlin. At the same time she had changed from an insignificant slip of a girl to a young woman of remarkable attractions, in which her mother's rather lukewarm, passive sensuality was refined and ennobled by the dreamy romanticism of her musical father. Augusta Seraphia was very dark—it is not improbable that her mother had in her gipsy blood from the forests—she had an abundance of dark, shining hair, and a complexion whose darkness might formerly have been attributed to neglect at home, but which now, when various toilet accessories stood on shelves within her reach, showed itself to be as natural as the brightness of her hair—a warm

olive tone which called up images of rich velvets, soft divans, the tender notes of mandolins, mocha and narghile in a sweetly scented atmosphere. Slenderly built, active as a deer, well-developed for her age, her beauty might have been taken from a picture entitled "A Corner of the Sultan's Harem."

How much truth there was in the gossip which connected her name with that of a young lieutenant none of the family knew for certain. Nor had any of them the moral courage to go into the matter for fear of being confronted with a *fait accompli* and the disgrace it would involve. Old grandmamma had several times tried to speak to the musician about the matter. But his bad conscience as regards the children and their future made him answer abruptly:

"Well, mother, you can't say *her* life is a failure because she hasn't been to the university or become a bandmaster."

Instead, grandmamma had begged the mathematician to reason with the girl, if it was not too late already. "There's never anything but trouble in this family," she said. But the mathematician had refused at once. He did not understand women, he said. He had proposed to a woman once in his life and been accepted, and he considered that he had thereby fulfilled his duties towards the weaker sex. He did not consider that he possessed the most elementary qualifications for so delicate a task as that of intruding upon a woman's tender feelings, endeavouring to reason with her or lead her back to the paths of virtue. For a task like that a man with curlier hair than his was needed. His was straight, as his mother well knew. He thanked Providence for having given him only sons. He understood boys. Anyhow, he knew how to teach them to behave themselves. But women were not his speciality. He further enlightened his mother as to the existence of something called heredity.

At all events, her son Anders had *something* on his mind. And that, in her judgment, must be grief at his daughter's

immorality. He had often told old grandmamma that he was now seriously determined to begin his work on "Jephthah, prophet of Israel." He had said: "I know what it means to sacrifice one's own daughter," and had added, "I want to finish 'Jephthah' before it's too late. A man must leave *something* behind him in the world."

The mathematician shrugged his shoulders. He had difficulty in seeing how the prophet Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter could have any connection with the fact—if it was a fact, which he for his part had no reason either to believe or to doubt—that Augusta Seraphia had an intrigue with the young lieutenant. Deuce take it, it was not *Anders* who had flung her into the boy's arms! Anders, unfortunately, had done a good deal in his life that he should not have done; but procuring was a thing of which he considered him under no circumstances capable. All this talk about him and Jephthah's daughter and Augusta Seraphia proved only *one* thing, and that was something everyone knew perfectly well already—the simple fact that Anders's top story was very poorly furnished. Last of all, experience had shown that until Anders began to *yell* there was no danger.

But the mathematician's logical acuteness did not calm grandmamma. It was certain—she could swear to it—that the girl had been deceiving her family the whole spring, possibly ever since the New Year. She had come home late in the evening, not to say late at night, and pleaded stock-taking after the Christmas sales. It had, however, constantly happened that grandmamma herself, about eleven at night, had put on her cloak and walked past Carin Andersson's tailoring establishment, and found it in total darkness. "And one doesn't take stock in the dark," she observed.

The mathematician could not contest the logic of this conclusion. But, as he had said, he had not curly enough hair to interfere in women's affairs. If a man grew up crooked, one could try to straighten him by a good thrash-

ing. But one couldn't lay hands on a woman. . . . He did not care at all for the idea of reporting the lieutenant to the colonel. He would rather ask the lad for a private interview and give him a perfectly commonplace hiding. But suppose the boy replied that he loved Augusta Seraphia? Then he could say, "Then will you kindly marry her?" But apart from the fact that such a scene was too much like something in a novel for his taste, he could, personally, very well understand that even a young man in love might think twice and think hard before he decided to become son-in-law to Anders and Hulda.

And there the matter remained. Uncle Anders had to keep his sorrow, whatever it might be, to himself.

X

Uncle Anders had always particularly disliked the manoeuvres which took place every autumn. During the three weeks for which they lasted he was compelled to do daily duty as battery trumpeter, which introduced into his life an element of hurry and pressure peculiarly uncongenial to his poetical, contemplative temperament.

But besides this, the manoeuvres added another factor to his existence—the horse. He had the most profound antipathy to this noble animal—the result of many painful experiences. His short legs prevented him from getting a proper grip with his knees. The long upper part of his body, and his yearly increasing stoutness, made his heavy upperworks as insecure as a ship with too much deck cargo in a gale.

The place which, as battery trumpeter, he occupied during the manoeuvres was unluckily so prominent that his defects as a horseman, natural and acquired, were bound to

attract notice. It was his duty to ride a horse's length behind the battery commander to one side and convey his orders to the battery by trumpet. In other words, what Uncle Anders had to do was this: at full gallop, amid the thundering of wheels, the puffing and snorting of the horses and the creaking of saddles, with a cloud of dust enshrouding the battery as it rushed forward, to put his instrument to his lips and, with his head bent back and the upper part of his body leaning slightly to the right, trumpet the battery commander's will skyward. A noble sight and inspiring to heroic deeds, but a task of real difficulty to one of Anders Lekholm's disposition and bodily habit.

Unfortunately, too, he had got a new battery commander that year—one of those too common one-sided humorists who are fond of jesting at their neighbours' expense and in Dr. Holmes's adopted country are called "practical jokers." Presumably he thought Uncle Anders an ass, and he had fairly good reason for taking such a view. One thing is certain—he must have known that his abilities as a horseman were of the slenderest. At the very beginning of the manoeuvres he gave orders that the battery trumpeter should exchange his old, well-trained grey mare for another horse chosen by himself. It was a big chestnut hunter, with a broad back—which further reduced the grip and manoeuvring power of Uncle Anders's short legs—with a mouth like wood, so that it was practically impossible to stop it, and inspired with a zeal which kept it a length ahead of all the others. To crown everything, it had never before been ridden by a trumpeter. It was a beast without its like in the whole regiment—a fit mount for a giant with legs of steel and a pugilist's muscles.

Uncle Anders protested as vigorously as a subordinate properly could do and with all the moving accents of entreaty a terrified musician can command; but all in vain.

And so began a two-days' equestrian pantomime out on the training ground, during which the whole battery, from the commander down to the latest-joined recruit, rocked in their saddles in suppressed convulsions of laughter. No sooner had Uncle Anders put his trumpet to his lips to convey the captain's order in ringing tones, than the chestnut set off at a breakneck gallop with extended nostrils. He did not stop till he had reached the other side of the ground, where the lake brought him to a halt; and Uncle Anders returned to be met by an astonished query from his commanding officer:

"Where the devil have you been, sergeant? This isn't a race. Blow column right wheel, trot!"

And the same thing happened again. . . .

Strange as it may seem, the first day Uncle Anders contrived to keep his seat. It was said that he was perspiring copiously when the battery rode back through the town a few hours later, and that he was shaking all over with fatigue and terror when at last he stood on the ground again outside the stables.

But next day he was thrown. The horse galloped on and returned by degrees to the battery, where, after some curveting and circling, it forced its way into the ranks and took up the position it had always been accustomed to occupy during battery training. But Uncle Anders was left lying on the ground. It was seen that he repeatedly endeavoured to rise, only to fall back on his side again, with one elbow to the ground.

As it was not outside the bounds of possibility that he had sustained some serious injury, he was conveyed to the garrison hospital, where, after a minute examination, it was ascertained that there was nothing the matter with him except that he was—drunk. This conclusion was arrived at on a purely medical basis and as the result of elaborate tests; for Anders himself declared that he had never con-

sumed any alcoholic liquor whatever from the day he had entered the Good Templars' lodge.

Seeing how much was at stake for Uncle Anders, and that no one realized this better than himself, it is hardly probable that he would have capitulated and confessed only on the strength of the result of the examination, clear as it was. Although his brother, the mathematician, had so often said that his "upper story was poorly furnished," he can hardly have been so blind to his own most vital interests as deliberately to have betrayed his secret to the world; he must rather, it would seem, have persisted in his simple tactics of flat denial, if only to gain time. One must, I think, look deep into the history of human development, and go back to the days of witchcraft trials and the Inquisition, to understand his sudden confession of the whole truth. Terrified at the prospect of having, every day for another two and a half weeks, to mount the wild beast a humorous captain had placed at his disposal, he had preferred to put his cards on the table and take the consequences rather than again endure the mortal fear of the past two days. It is not outside the bounds of psychological possibility that, at the moment, not only a month's isolation from the outer world, but even dismissal from the service, seemed to him preferable to daily torture on horseback.

In short, he confessed to the battalion surgeon. He admitted not only that he had drunk copiously that morning to give himself strength and courage for the impending death ride, but also that for several years he had secretly consumed strong drink, originally with the sole object of "getting into the right mood to compose the Good Templars' march."

The feelings the confession excited among the inhabitants of the town varied in accordance with their personal relationship to the lost one: despair, grief, wrath, consternation, astonishment, amusement.

Events followed quickly.

Just at this time the old Lekholms had moved to the mathematician's. The lacemaker sat for days on end in an armchair at the mathematician's parlour window, twiddled his thumbs, took snuff or sucked a cigar, while he sought a little relief from his cares in looking at the people down on the boulevard. At almost regular intervals, like those at which the sea rises in a wave bigger and higher than those before and after it, his heavy breathing culminated in a sigh: "O-o-oh—yes—but . . ." Old grandmamma, whom not even despair could keep unoccupied, had sat down in the dining-room with some crochet. Her thin, blue-veined hands fumbled with the meshes, and her eyes were full of tears—not of grief, but of strain caused by the work. Now and again she laid it on her knees, pushed her spectacles up on her forehead, dried her eyes and broke into a monologue of lamentation. In fragmentary utterances she reviewed the whole of her life since the day when by marrying the lacemaker she had taken the name of Lekholm—a long life of wrongs, disappointments, sorrows and cares. To her grandsons, the mathematician's boys, she pitilessly revealed her own tragedy and that of the Lekholm family, and the refrain to every strophe of her lamentation was this: music was the curse of all the Lekholms.

For her and her father long ago music had been only a blessing, a source of gladness and a service to God. But in her children music had been combined with the Lekholms's conceit; and that had been their misfortune. There was only one thing she could never understand—where Lekholm had got his conceit from. To her knowledge he had never done anything in his life except commit follies. In the midst of her despair she still felt like laughing when she thought that the king had said a few years ago, outside the railway station, that he hoped Sweden would have many men like her Lekholm in the hour of danger. Yes, a lot of help they

would be! Might God preserve the kingdom from all danger, if the king had nothing but Lekholms to rely on!

And not only had he, in his vanity, wasted all that he had on his miserable brother; he had the face to say to her that it was *she* who had brought misfortune into the family with her music. Had music made her honourable, universally respected old father unhappy? Or herself? Heaven knew what she would have done if she had not had music as a refuge in her misery! Music had been a divine gift to the Töpfers; to the Lekholms it was a curse. What did it prove except that it was the Lekholm traits in the children which dragged them down into misery? Music should make them humble. It can bear no conceit; conceit soils it, and he who devotes himself to music in a spirit of conceit is sacrificing not to God in heaven, but to the prince of darkness.

The mathematician was the centre of activity at this period. Externally he seemed just as usual, except that he nervously and ceaselessly chewed his quid. When he came home from duty in the afternoon, grandmamma's lamentation ceased. She pushed her spectacles up on to her forehead and looked at him, followed every one of his movements for some time, and at last uttered a hesitating "Well?"

"I've had a talk with the colonel to-day. He has promised to take a lenient view of the matter if Anders applies for his discharge immediately. Otherwise there'll be a court-martial. Where's the sense in his spending a month in the cells when he'll be dismissed the service afterwards, anyhow, and lose his pension? He's made the devil of a lot of trouble for himself, and other people. And I can't see him or speak to him. I've been there three times. But my lord won't receive anyone. He's locked himself in, Hulda says. I knocked on the door myself, but he didn't answer. Hulda says she always gets one and the same answer from him: 'I'm played out. They can do what they like with me, I'm played out.'

"But *I'm* not played out. I've even written out his application for discharge. But if you think I can get him to sign it you're mistaken. He can't even hold a pen. If he hasn't signed the application and handed it to me by to-morrow morning early, into clink he goes. And then he'll get no pension. He'll be dismissed the service. I hope he'll be able to write his name to-night. He's only got fourteen hours to do it in—till nine to-morrow morning; I must have it then. He *can't!*"

The mathematician crushed his quid impatiently.

From within the parlour the old lacemaker's deep sighing was heard:

"O-o-o-oh ye-es, but——"

The lacemaker had had no afternoon sleep that day. And now it was seven in the evening. The deep sigh ended in a long yawn.

"O-o-o-oh, ye-es, bu-u-u-ut . . ."

Next day, when they were all at supper in the mathematician's house, there was a ring at the bell. Some members of the "Well done" lodge wished to speak to him. They had tried to see their late brother Anders, but had only been able to exchange a few words with him through the door. He was tired and ill and quite played out, he had said. It was a very important matter. . . .

The mathematician showed them into his room, and the door was closed on them. The room was on the other side of the parlour, and in the silence which enveloped the supper table voices from within could now and then be heard; at times they were raised in heated discussion, only to drop back into quiet conversational tones the next minute.

The rest of the family remained sitting over their supper. The clock ticked on the wall and struck the half-hour and the hour. Grandpapa sat with his hands in his lap, twiddling his thumbs. But he was in such a state of nervous tension that he did not sigh once.

It was late when the mathematician showed the brethren of the order out through the parlour into the lobby and the front-door was shut on them.

"How long they were!" his wife said nervously.

He only nodded in reply, as if he had hardly even heard what she said.

"I suppose he's been expelled from the lodge," grand-mamma surmised.

"No," he answered, "they came to say that they thought of making him Grand Master."

Then his wife rose, her hands pressed to her bosom in fear.

"Oh, Carl, what's the matter with you? What's happened? I've never seen you like this before. You're as white as chalk."

"We'd better be white as long as we can. We shall be red for shame soon."

He stopped and stared down at the dining-room carpet for a long time, while the wrinkles in his forehead grew deeper than ever. At last he looked up and said:

"They came to say that he has embezzled money of theirs."

His wife had sat down. It was as though a cloudburst, a hailstorm, had descended on the family; they all sat with their heads bent forward, staring down into their plates.

His wife was the first to look up. She said slowly, emphasizing every word:

"That—means—prison."

But before the mathematician could answer, something had happened. Suddenly the old lacemaker stood upright and struck the table with his thin white hand again and again, so that plates and knives and forks leapt up and down.

"Silence, I say! Don't utter the word prison. No Lekholm has ever been in prison as far as I know. I won't hear the word. Silence!"

The mathematician looked at his father with a hardly perceptible smile of compassion.

"Don't be so violent, my dear father. Of course, if you're in a position to interfere, I don't think those gentlemen will have any objection to hushing up the business."

Grandmamma gave her spouse and old antagonist an edged glance:

"Have you ever done anything but rush in without thinking what you're doing, Lekholm?"

But the unexpected happened. The lacemaker refused to be crushed, either by his son's icy calmness or his wife's taunt. He thumped the table with his fist again.

"He shan't go to prison! I'll see to that! I can stop that!"

The mathematician gave him a long look, and an impatient twitching began in the region of the concealed quid.

"How are you going to stop it?"

"You and Per will stop it. You'll pay up. I won't have a son in prison."

"Well, father, as for Per, I can't answer for what he may think fit to do. And as for myself——"

The old man took a few steps towards him. Two dark-red spots flamed up in his sunken waxen cheeks, the blue veins on his temples swelled.

"As for you, do you say? As for you? Am I your father or not?"

The nervous twitch in the mathematician's face became more violent. To get away from his old father, he turned his back on him and went and sat down on the sofa under the clock.

"Am I your father or not?" the old man repeated.

"Let us hope so. Anyhow it's pretty certain that Anders is my brother. But for Heaven's sake sit down, father, and let us try to keep calm."

"I will not sit down at your table till you have promised

to save your own brother from prison. I will not set foot in your house again if you don't help him."

The mathematician passed his hand over his eyes again and again.

"Don't use such hard words, dear father—don't use such hard words. You know as well as I do that both Per and I have done a great deal for Anders already, a great deal. And it has hardly done any good."

"You don't mean that it would do him good to go to prison?"

"I can't say. It could hardly make his *position* any worse—at any rate, economically. He's sure of his pension now, as he managed to sign his application for discharge last night. Personally I must say that I shouldn't weep if a fellow of brother Anders's calibre had, just for once in his life, to take the responsibility for all the devilment and trouble he's caused. But that's another question. There's another point, too, and I tried to drive it into the skulls of the 'Well done' gentlemen—that if, with the knowledge they have or ought to have of his antecedents, they let him manage their accounts without even thinking of having them checked, I'm almost inclined to think that it's they who ought to pay the piper now, and not others. Such *naïveté* as they have shown is not merely criminal; it's sheer madness. But, strictly speaking, that isn't relevant either."

"If they had any honour they would pay, of course," grandmamma said. "But I've never believed in Good Templars. My father, who was an absolutely honourable and highly respected man, never needed to join any order, and yet he never touched strong drink. But he was a Töpfer and not a Lekholm. If Anders had been a Töpfer and not a Lekholm there need never have been any talk of prison or anything of the kind, that's my opinion."

Grandpapa gave her a look.

"I will only point out that before I married you and our children were born, no Lekholm had been in prison. And no Lekholm will go there as long as I live. When I'm dead and buried, I can't help what happens. But as long as I live——"

"You're talking nonsense. I'd like to know what *you* can do to help matters. You're just a talker, that's what you are!"

The mathematician shrugged his shoulders and interrupted them.

"So father wants Per and me to intervene. I can't answer for Per. He has never told me how well off he is."

"He's got money invested," the lacemaker burst out.

"I don't think he has."

"He *could* have, if he hadn't given all he could scrape together to that mission."

"He can do what he thinks best with his money so long as he doesn't interfere with other people's rights."

"Per is a misguided fellow. He doesn't worship in God's house, but goes to mission meetings instead, and he's actually one of those who take the Sacrament at home in coffee. Is that God's commandment? I ask you. Is it reverent to participate in Christ's flesh and blood in coffee with brandy in it? Whereabouts in the Bible does it say that coffee shall represent Christ's blood?"

Grandmamma sighed.

"You're talking nonsense, Lekholm. You must surely know there was no such thing as coffee at the time when the Son of God dwelt among us."

"I know that," the lacemaker snapped. "But I know too that if there had been coffee in the days when Our Saviour lived and worked here on earth, He would not have been foolish enough to invite His disciples to coffee the night when He was betrayed. Not even the traitor Judas would have thought of anything so insane. But that's just what

Per and his friends do. That fellow Waldenström ought to be burned at the stake. He leads away foolish people from God's house and the true doctrine."

"Well, Christ's blood is in coffee just as much as it is in wine, *if* the Waldenströmites drink coffee at Communion, which they *don't*," said the mathematician impatiently. His wife raised her eyebrows and gave him a swift look which for as long as Dr. Holmes could remember had meant, "Remember the children!"

The mathematician replied with an almost imperceptible nod to show that he had understood.

"But let's get back to the question we've got to clear up before we go to bed—and that isn't Per's attitude in this matter, but *mine*! I'd like to say to you, father, as calmly as I can and with all possible self-control, that, in the first place, I have made great sacrifices for Anders already, and so has Per. It has always been we who, in the long run, have had to pay the piper for his exploits. In the second place, I would like to point out that it isn't, strictly speaking, Maria or I who come into question, but our boys. You know that Maria and I once, many years ago, made an agreement that we would give our children a better start in life, and greater chances of getting somewhere, than I had had. We have worked for that all these years. It looks at present as if our work would bear fruit. The boys are doing well at school on the whole, and I hope they will do well in future. Lars will go to the university in a couple of years. Two years later it will be Karl's turn. Maria and I have discussed the matter and agreed that if the boys want to do so, and conduct themselves well in other ways, they can go on and take their degrees.

"If I intervene now, Lars at least cannot go to the university. It will be quite out of the question. So you want Lars's future to be sacrificed to save Anders two or three months in gaol which won't affect his future or his money

position in the smallest degree. And which will hardly save him or us the disgrace, seeing that the whole town knows already that he has embezzled. Is that what you want? That's what the consequence will be, anyhow."

The mathematician's face twitched. His sons saw what an effort it cost him to control himself.

"If that is so, I feel bound to say that we Lekholms seem to have a peculiar fate, or whatever one may call it, reserved for us—to sacrifice our children's future for our brothers! . . ."

The old lacemaker had risen. His parchment cheeks were burning. He beat the air with his clenched fist:

"You mean that I've sacrificed—that I've destroyed—that my brother . . . I'll tell you one thing, that I'm proud of having done all I could for my brother Oscar. I'm as proud of it as I am of my medals for bravery. And you dare to accuse me!"

He raised his clenched fist above his head, as though he sought to call down God's punishment on the house and those who dwelt in it.

"Don't you know what the catechism says? don't you know how the Fifth Commandment runs? *Thou shalt honour thy father and thy mother, that thy days may be long in the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee.* Have you forgotten that, freethinker? Do you curse your own father because he has acted in accordance with Christ's word, which says that one shall love one's neighbour as one's self? *I did all I could for my brother.* You send *your* brother into misery, to prison."

The mathematician too had risen now. His long, sinewy body was shaking all over. His lips had thinned to two straight, bloodless lines under his moustache. His wife hid her face in her hands.

"Just one word more, father," the mathematician said in a stifled voice. "Just one word more. I know, and I have known for many years, that in your heart you hate Maria

and me, because—because we've lived a careful life, because we've lived for our children and their future, and haven't flung away what small chances we have had of helping them in life. We and our boys have been a reproach to you ever since Lars first went to the elementary school."

The lacemaker met his son's hard, steely gaze. He drew up his shrivelled little form to its full height.

"It's you who hate me!" he cried. "You're a freethinker and a heathen! You don't believe in God, in His law and His Gospel. But remember what Holy Writ says, my son: Thou shalt honour thy father and thy mother. This is my last word in my own son's house. Good night, and I wish you all God's peace, now and always. For it is also written: Unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer also the other!"

He collapsed again. He looked like Old Time as he left the room, with his long, white moustache and whiskers, his mass of white hair and his shrunken little body.

The mathematician accompanied him to help him on with his overcoat, but he replied with a curt "*No!*"

The mathematician went into his room and shut the door behind him. His wife had burst into tears. But old grand-mamma sat stiffly in her chair, unmoved by the painful scene. When she heard the old lacemaker shut the door behind him, she only said:

"If he only had the excuse that he was in his second childhood! But he's never been anything but a child. No one can imagine what I've had to bear since I went to live in *his* house."

In a short time the mathematician returned. He had a folded paper in his hand.

"I've written a telegram to Per asking him to come at once. You'd better take it, Lars, and run to the telegraph office to-morrow morning in first break."

Uncle Per had replied by return that he would take the morning express and would, therefore, arrive in the evening. Now they were sitting and waiting for him. The mathematician had gone to the station to meet him. There was a clean cloth on the supper-table, the best china, silver forks, a pewter teapot with shining black ebony handle, silver salt-cellars with blue glass insides and a silver sugar-basin shaped like a Greek urn. The smell of beefsteak with onions and baked potatoes came from the kitchen.

Grandpapa had put in an appearance, despite his avowed intention never again to cross his son Carl's threshold. The mathematician had given way to his wife's moving appeals, visited the old gentleman early in the morning, and begged his pardon for his wounding remarks the evening before. The old man had promised to come on condition that he should under no circumstances be compelled to exchange a single word with Carl; at the same time he had declared that he would under no circumstances partake of supper or accept a cigar if offered one.

As for Uncle Anders, he was still in bed, locked into his room. The old lacemaker had, after a long parley, been admitted to his room. Uncle Anders had turned his face to the wall the whole time, said that he neither could nor would look his father in the face, nor anyone else except his faithful Hulda, and declared that he did not care what might happen; he was played out. He had said all this in a scarcely audible voice, with his face turned to the wall. He had asked the old man to forgive him for the sorrow he had caused him during a wasted and useless life, and to convey the same request to all the others. He could do no more. Most of the time grandpapa had been in his room he had lain silent, absolutely motionless. But when grandpapa told him that Per was expected in the evening, he made a convulsive movement, as if in terror, and said:

"No, no, for Heaven's sake, whatever you do, don't bring

him here. I don't want to see him! I don't want to talk to him! He's worse to talk to than Carl himself!"

"I'm sorry to say he smelt strong of drink," grandpapa said, in recounting what had happened.

Grandpapa had represented to Hulda what a wrong and shocking thing it was to give brandy to a man who had not only been expelled from a temperance order, but had also embezzled their money. But Hulda, the silly creature, had replied that if a poor fellow needed a pick-me-up *once in his life*, it was when he was in poor Anders's present situation.

In the afternoon the two emissaries from "Well done" called on the mathematician and had a long conversation with him; they showed him books and accounts, orated and insisted.

And now they were sitting waiting for Uncle Per, the lacemaker's eldest son, of whom his old grandfather, Herr Töpfer, had said that he "considered him an extraordinarily religious child, who did not need to have brains."

XI

Now, long after, with the deeper insight derived from time and profound meditation on the Lekholm family, Karl had no difficulty in discovering in Uncle Per's individual characteristics, and the new type he represented in the family, traits which had occurred in it previously or in some one of his contemporaries.

He was poor Aunt Charlotte's twin brother, and under his black double-breasted tail-coat there burned something of the same dark passion which for years had lain hid beneath her latest Copenhagen bodice. His fire and vehemence he had inherited from the lacemaker, while his German earnestness came from the surgeon. From old Töpfer, too, he had doubtless acquired his religious turn of mind; and this

had been further strengthened and developed in earliest childhood through his intimacy with the old Swedenborgian, vegetarian, hater of intoxicants and preacher of clean living. His taste for music, too, came from his mother. Every morning and evening he played two psalms on his harmonium. Towards all non-religious music his attitude was one of condemnation.

That he had become a follower of Waldenström was due mainly to chance. It is hardly probable that the eminent divine's divergence from the State Church as regards the doctrine of atonement had determined his choice. Theological hair-splittings can have made no appeal to him; nor, indeed, did intellectual interests generally.

What had happened was simply this. He had left his native town as a journeyman and gone north. Circumstances had placed him with a joiner in a little town where the followers of Waldenström were just forming an active group, and his new master had joined them. But it is probable that if fate had placed him in a community where the Baptists or the Methodists had started an equally vigorous spiritual movement, he would have joined them.

For vehemence and earnestness meant everything to him. If he had found these qualities in the State Church he would certainly never have condemned it as severely as he did—as the greatest enemy of real, profound religious life.

As a citizen and in his profession he was attended by a good fortune which must have been a constant reminder of God's special satisfaction with all that he did. Even at the time of the events described he had long before taken over his master's workshop and considerably extended it. He employed over twenty workmen, all belonging to the same religious community as himself. His flawless sense of honour, the weight of his personality, his lucid and calm judgment of all worldly affairs, had soon attracted the attention not only of the congregation but of his fellow-citizens in

general, and had brought him into communal life as a town councillor at a comparatively early age.

The prosperity he enjoyed as a citizen was not accompanied by mental peace. He was one of those people who at once give the impression of a constant, sometimes violent inner conflict. What this conflict was, what it was about, on what plan and with what weapons it was fought, no one knew. Yes, perhaps one man knew—P. P. Waldenström himself, whose close friend Uncle Per had in time become. But no one else. People only felt and knew, as certainly as if he had confessed all that was in his heart: That man is fundamentally unhappy; under that man's double-breasted, ever-buttoned black tail-coat a life-and-death struggle is in progress.

It was not hard to think of one reason for his unhappiness. Early in his life he had married a young woman of the congregation. But the marriage was a childless one. His wife had twice been pregnant, but each time the child had died: the elder at birth, the younger of scarlet fever when three years old. This Divine punishment had affected his wife's mind; she suffered continual mental anguish, which at times clouded her reason and made her feel as though her breast was a cooking-pot, and that her poor heart was being boiled in it as a feast for the black birds, heralds of death, that fluttered before her eyes in the dark at night.

Uncle Per did not often visit his native town. Even as a child, when the old surgeon had died and he had gone home to his parents, he had been a stranger to his brothers and sister, had spent his time alone, with no playmates, keeping to himself the secrets over which he brooded. His religion had alienated him still further from his relations. He was to them a riddle, respected on account of his insolubility and the melancholy, serious dignity which characterized him even when quite young. The old lacemaker thoroughly disapproved of him in several respects. For one thing, there

was his ungodly dissent, in particular the receiving of Holy Communion "in an ordinary room or some mission hall or other."

The lacemaker also condemned most vehemently Per's way of managing his worldly possessions. It seemed as though Uncle Per was trying by all possible means to work against or neutralize his own material prosperity, as though he had seriously made Christ's commandment a leading principle in his life—not to lay up treasures upon earth, where moth and rust corrupt. Such a procedure might, in the old lacemaker's view, have had some justification in Christ's time, but hardly in our days, when, to quote the old gentleman's own words, "bank rate was so high." What he really meant by this obscure allusion, and what connection it had with the inadvisability of failing to lay up treasures, it is not easy to understand. But the lacemaker had never been noted for clear thought or economic perspicacity. The fact was that Uncle Per gave to the "movement" practically all that he felt he could spare from his modest household requirements. His little home, moreover, provided free quarters for travelling preachers and brothers and sisters of the community.

Old Fru Lekholm, for her part, was grieved that he should regard non-religious music as a temptation of the devil designed to lead men into sin. Aunt Charlotte regarded him simply as a humbug. She knew what men were like.

The musician was terrified at his exalted moral earnestness, and the mathematician could not understand "how a man with such indisputably good brains, such a clear, objective view of things in general, could be so illogical as to believe for a single moment in God's all-wisdom and goodness in a world like that in which we are for our sins compelled to live."

None of this criticism was heard on the occasions when

Uncle Per visited his parental home, generally in connection with a missionary meeting or on account of brother Anders's escapades. He brought with him a peculiar atmosphere which Dr. Holmes always connected with the Good Friday feeling, a heavy, guilty solemnity. The Lekholm children were not the only people who felt his presence as an oppression. The older members of the family, too, seemed to feel a painful need for spiritual spring-cleaning before his arrival.

And now he was coming. . . .

He was tall and thin; and in his tightly buttoned tail-coat he looked even taller and thinner than he was. He had a pale clean-shaven face, a high white forehead, a narrow, hard mouth, and a pair of grey eyes of a curious sharpness, an almost gentle and sorrowful sharpness. It was a look which, for all its gentle forgiveness, crushed and annihilated—a Good Friday look, which mercilessly placed one's own sinful little life against the background of the Cross, on which the Son of Man bled and suffered and died.

And now he was to talk to Uncle Anders. . . .

The two eldest Lekholm boys at least had only one thought with regard to his visit. And that was: Poor Uncle Anders. The intention was that he should go to see his brother, the musician, immediately after supper, and have a private conversation with him. The old lacemaker had paid Uncle Anders another visit and pointed out the necessity of his having a conversation with Per. And Anders had at last promised to receive him.

What would Uncle Per say to him? He never grew angry like the mathematician, never flew into a rage, never used hard words or lost his self-control. Nor did he use smooth language, or use religious arguments where they could avail nothing; he had never made the slightest attempt to effect conversions among his relatives. He was really most formidable when he said nothing at all, and

only his look pointed out the road a fellow-mortal had to travel—the road to Golgotha, the road of the bloody sweat, which *must be trodden*.

That was how he would look at Uncle Anders. Uncle Anders, who had broken the pledge, who had lived for years a life of hypocrisy and lies, and now actually saw prison doors opening before him. Poor Uncle Anders! He would meet him in an hour or two. The train from the North had come already. The voices of the mathematician and Uncle Per might be heard in the lobby at any moment. . . .

As the family waited for them there came a sudden ring at the bell—a long, hard ring. In that moment of tension no one, curiously enough, was surprised at the mathematician not opening the door himself with his latch-key. Instead they all rose from their chairs in the parlour, where they had been sitting in silence, and went out into the lobby to receive the guest. When they came out the maid had already opened the door, and there, on the threshold, stood Hulda Lekholm, hatless, with dishevelled hair and a shawl thrown over her shoulders.

“He’s cut his throat!” she said.

XII

Among the few things that Uncle Anders left behind him was a funeral march, fully orchestrated and complete. It was dedicated to his old regiment. “Jephthah’s Daughter,” on the other hand, he had never completed.

Anders Lekholm’s funeral march was not, however, to be played at his funeral. No ceremonies could take place at his interment, no church bells ring his soul to rest, no prayers be read over his body, no procession follow him to the station where the simple coffin was placed on a goods truck to be

conveyed, in accordance with the law of the land, to the anatomical institute at Lund.

But Anders Lekholm's funeral march lived. It did not outstrip Chopin's, as he had so often threatened that it would. It did not spread all over the world, not even over his own country. But at any rate it became the funeral march of his native town and his regiment; and to its strains, in the course of years, many a soldier, of high and low rank, and many a citizen was borne to his last resting-place.

XIII

A few days before Christmas in the year in which Uncle Anders had departed this life right in the middle of the manœuvres, an event occurred which cast a glamour of anticipation over a festival which had promised to be a grey and gloomy one, the kind of atmosphere in which painful memories raise their heads and grow like mushrooms.

Uncle Fredrik came home unexpectedly from America!

None of the Lekholm children had ever seen him. Nevertheless, during a great part of their youth he had been a hero of their imagination—greater in a way, and certainly for a longer time, than Uncle Anders himself.

The part Uncle Fredrik had played in their childish and boyish fancy could best be described by saying that he began where Uncle Anders left off. He had, in a natural, matter-of-course way, come to occupy the place in their imagination which the musician left so grievously empty when, from being an idol, an apparition from the realms of romantic splendour, he dwindled to the poor little figure he cut in reality.

None of the family had any idea what Uncle Fredrik was now, or where he lived.

But he once *had* been, the older ones declared, all that to a boy's brain and a boy's longing is the embodiment of manliness, enterprise and adventure; he had been both a cowboy and a gold-digger.

On the table near the sofa in the old lacemaker's parlour was an album with a red plush cover, to which the Lekholm boys in due order, at intervals of a few years, made a pilgrimage as to a holy place. On the third page of this album, at the top on the left-hand side, was Uncle Fredrik's portrait. The photograph, it is true, corresponded in no way to their ideas, derived from books about Red Indians, of a white hero in combat with Indians thirsting for his scalp. It was one of those faded photographs from the beginning or middle of the seventies, and it showed a young man with whiskers and moustaches (heavily blackened in the retouching) seated on a narrow, high-backed drawing-room chair, clad in a black tail-coat and tight, light-coloured trousers, and carrying a walking-stick. On a small table beside him was a black tall hat; and at his feet sat a pug-dog (of papier mâché) with its head a trifle on one side and its forehead deeply wrinkled, as though reverently and attentively testing the breadth and profundity of the words of wisdom which fell from its master's lips.

But far from having an entirely chilling effect on an adventure-loving, sanguinary boy's imagination, this faded old *carte de visite* photograph filled them with marvel. It was wonderful that anyone so attired could at the same time be a hero who, wearing a broad-brimmed hat and leather breeches richly ornamented with silver, swung his lasso over the buffalo herds of the Wild West, or for weeks and months trod the roughest, most perilous tracks in search of the red gold. The dualism of the album photograph and the wonderful living reality only made Uncle Fredrik a hero of such fantastic dimensions that grandpapa himself had to be appealed to to confirm the reality of the phenomenon.

The old lacemaker gave this confirmation most willingly. He pushed his moustaches aside and said:

"What do you say, boy? Is it true that Fredrik looked as he does in the photograph and yet could be a hero, a cowboy and a gold-digger? Deuce take it, boy, what do you mean? Why shouldn't he be a hero, although he's dressed like ordinary people are on Sundays? What do *I* look like when I go to church on Sundays? Deuce take it, boy, you don't know what you're talking about! Or when I'm sitting at the loom with my spectacles on? Do you think I wasn't in the fight at Kolding, all the same? Or what do you think?"

And thus the inquisitive grandson had the fight at Kolding rubbed into him. . . .

There was, however, in Uncle Fredrik's life yet a further dualism, quite as incomprehensible as that of the gentleman in the album and the gold-digger, cowboy and slayer of Indians. It appeared from what the grown-ups said that Uncle Fredrik's youth had been divided between two professions so incompatible to a boy's brain as those of sailor and gardener.

Like his elder brother Carl, the mathematician, he had gone to sea when he grew up. He had been away a few years, came home, been apprenticed to a nursery gardener named Söderquist, stayed with him some years, gone off again, come back again, rented a garden and married. It had seemed that this restless spirit was at last to settle down quietly. But suddenly the devil came into him again—the expression by which the old lacemaker was accustomed to designate Uncle Fredrik's *Wanderlust*. He had read in the papers of new gold finds somewhere in America, and embarked with his wife and his six-months-old son. His wife died on the passage, was sewn up in a sail and buried at sea. A few days later the baby boy followed his mother. And Uncle Fredrik landed on America's soil for the third time, alone.

He had written home for a few years. Now he was at the gold-diggings, now he had a job on a ranch, now he was working as a gardener in California.

Then silence followed, complete silence. Only occasionally at the great annual festivals, when the Lekholms assembled in obligatory peace and harmony, was there talk of him, of his restless spirit, his longing for adventure, his thirst for gold, his longing for the quiet life of a gardener, and his incredibly light-hearted, almost criminal optimism. It had appeared from his letters home, it seemed, that he was convinced that he would one day, despite all reverses, be a very wealthy man and return to his native town in honour and glory.

"Poor Fredrik," old Fru Augusta Lekholm used to say on such occasions, "the honour and glory didn't amount to much. But he was a dear, good boy at bottom."

"He was a fool as a boy," the lacemaker replied, "and a fool he'll remain as long as he lives, if he isn't dead by now. But I think he might write home and tell us how he is."

Old Fru Lekholm gave her foolish husband an edged glance.

"If he's dead, how can he write home and tell us how he is, poor boy?"

The lacemaker thumped the table:

"I didn't say he was dead. I said *if* he was dead."

"Yes, and that's just what I say that you said. If he's dead, surely he can't write."

The mathematician shrugged his shoulders and interrupted the dispute.

"Dead or alive, one can say that he was an incurable dreamer, completely devoid of the most elementary power of reasoning and calculation. But that's his affair; and he's suffered for it, no doubt, poor devil. But it was *criminal* of

him to take his wife and child with him on an adventure of that kind."

He did not seem to have attained any glory or splendour. Years passed, never a line or a single word came from him.

And now, many years later, a few days before Christmas, when he had long been thought dead, the old lacemaker received a telegram:

"Arrive to-morrow by evening train. Fredrik."

All the Lekholms in the town, except old Fru Lekholm and the mathematician's wife, were at the station to meet him. The family had been substantially reduced during the past few months. Not only had Aunt Charlotte and Uncle Anders gone, in different ways, but Hulda and all her children had left their native town. At a family conclave the day after Uncle Anders's funeral, it had been decided that the musician's family should move to the town where Uncle Per had his successful business. He could get Hulda as much work as she could do. He employed a number of women in the town on jobs that need not be done in the workshop. And the children needed closer supervision than the mathematician could undertake to give them, occupied as he was from morning till evening, and with four boys of his own on his hands. He could find posts for Augusta and Hulda at once, for Augusta in his own business and for Hulda in a mission bookshop in which he had both a spiritual and a financial interest. The two elder boys could find employment in his workshop, while the two younger, Gunnar and Bertil, were to continue to attend the national school. He proposed to lodge the whole family in a three-roomed flat which he knew was standing empty, and into which they could move at once.

The lacemaker, his wife and the mathematician had found the proposal extremely sensible. It had, indeed, so appealed to the old lacemaker, liable as he was to be carried away by

any new fancy, that he expressed a desire to transfer his own household gods to his eldest son's town, that he might grow old and die far from the scene of family tragedies and personal defeats. And before he went to his eternal rest he could do a little lacemaking for his son's furniture factory.

For once in a way—perhaps for the first time since the journeyman lacemaker Pehr Anders Lekholm paid court to Mamsell Augusta Töpfer—it appeared that she shared his view. She too desired nothing more than to leave the town which for almost the whole of her womanhood had been for her a vale of humiliation and sorrow.

They were to move immediately after the New Year.

Only the lacemaker, the mathematician and the latter's four sons, therefore, were at the station to meet the interesting traveller from a distant land. When the train stopped they had gone up to a third-class carriage to welcome him and help him with his luggage. But no Uncle Fredrik was to be seen. All the other people in the carriage had got out. The mathematician got in himself to make sure that his brother was not still there. He jumped down on to the platform again, shrugged his shoulders and chewed the quid in his mouth nervously. The old lacemaker twirled his drooping moustaches in embarrassment. Well, well. . . .

Then, from the part of the platform opposite which the first-class carriage usually stopped, a tall, lean man approached them, with a furrowed, sun-burnt Red Indian's face under a broad-brimmed hat, a martial moustache, and clothes such as the mathematician's sons had never seen before—a lounge suit with padded shoulders of an athlete's breadth, wide trousers, a gaily striped silk shirt and new brogues as yellow as a duck's foot. They could not say which part of this turnout impressed them most; but perhaps it was the shoes that took the prize in a close contest. Yellow shoes were a rarity of the first order, previously worn in the

town only by a few young officers noted for dandified dress and debt, and as for the shape of Uncle Fredrik's shoes, nothing like them had ever been seen in any bootmaker's window in the place.

There was something lacking in his attire; but this was not discovered till the old lacemaker, after embracing him, said: "Where's your overcoat?" It appeared from Uncle Fredrik's reply that he was so hardened against rain and cold and storm that he never wore an overcoat.

Uncle Fredrik shook hands with his nephews one by one and asked their names and ages. It was a big dark-brown hand that took theirs, hard, rough and horny, ingrained with the soil.

"Where are your things?" the mathematician asked.

Uncle Fredrik jerked his head towards the hotel porter, who stood with shoulders bowed under the weight of three large yellow bags which he was carrying towards the exit.

"Why, there," he said.

"Aren't you coming to stay with me?" the mathematician asked, raising his eyebrows.

"Well," Uncle Fredrik replied, interlarding his speech curiously with English words, "I'd rather not disturb you. I'll stay at the hotel. Less trouble all round."

The old lacemaker stroked his moustaches again with a dissatisfied look. He did not like the overcoat business. A well-dressed man ought to have an overcoat, even if he did not need it as a protection against the cold. And then there was his manner of speech.

"Deuce take it," he muttered, "it's hard to understand the way you talk."

The Lekholm boys were sent straight home to their mother to tell her that all the steps she had taken to turn one of them out of his room and make it over to Uncle Fredrik were unnecessary. He would stay at the hotel. The mathe-

matician and the lacemaker had gone there with him, and, as soon as he had settled in, the three men would come back to supper.

For Dr. Holmes in particular Uncle Fredrik's visit to Sweden was to mean a definite change which was to affect the whole of his life.

He was then in the lower sixth. It was many years since he had left books about Indians to Sven and Tage for good and all. Even the heroic exploits of the Åbergs had ceased to set his heart on fire several terms ago. He had already tasted Strindberg and Geijerstam. But there were still in his heart wide fields that thirsted for the fertilizing rain of romantic adventure. In his heart of hearts he had not yet abandoned the hope that his life would be as wonderful as a fairy story, as full of variety and exploit as a legend. Strindberg's *Tschandala* had made him feel literally ill, and Erik Grane had given him the nauseated feeling of shame that follows secret self-indulgence. His whole soul thirsted for the action and tumult of the wide world, the rattle of sabres (in a figurative sense), the glamour, the glitter, the clink of spurs, the waving of plumes.

And now Uncle Fredrik appeared on the empty stage of his imagination, the man who had experienced just what his soul thirsted after—adventure, danger, uncertainty. . . .

He had not been able to sleep the night the telegram came. His brain was afire. He wondered how long Uncle Fredrik meant to stay. He wondered if he would ask him to go back with him, to share his hard, variegated life, to leave the dull little town, his school-work, reports, the Erik Grane university, the grey, gloomy life which, according to the literary heroes of the day, was all that awaited him. . . .

And then Uncle Fredrik came. . . .

Not only did he go to the tailor's the day after his arrival and order a winter coat to protect himself against a tempera-

ture which stood only a few degrees under zero. He not only revealed himself as the most commonplace man Dr. Holmes had ever met; in the pitiless light of growing disillusionment he became in his nephew's eyes stupidity personified. In this Karl did Uncle Fredrik a slight injustice, how great he never had an opportunity of finding out. But the more clearly he saw that the gilding on Uncle Fredrik's armour was only paper, the more savage became his desire to tear off his trappings.

The first week he was Uncle Fredrik's faithful slave. Uncle Fredrik had arrived the day before the autumn term ended, and Dr. Holmes, alias Kalle Lekholm, was able to place all his time at his disposal. He waited on him at an early hour of the morning, knocked shyly on the door of his hotel room, witnessed his toilet, and after breakfast went out walking with him in the town and its neighbourhood with a thousand questions on his lips concerning his uncle's past life.

But it appeared that this man's sole interest was to go about poking his nose into old courtyards, look up at the house walls and come out into the street again with the words:

"I've kicked up a jolly row here."

Then came the next house and the next yard and the next remark:

"I've kicked up a jolly row here too."

Even the fascination of his American accent diminished in a few days.

It was just the same at meals and of an evening. He sat and smoked his pipe, and of a sudden he would ask the mathematician:

"By the way, I was thinking of that fellow Axel Berggren. I used to play with him. What became of him?"

"He's dead."

"Oh, he's dead, is he? Well, perhaps it's best for him on

the whole. Though one never knows what comes after death. It's so hard nowadays. There are so many doctrines. One doesn't know what to believe. The old people were better off; they could stick to the Bible."

There was another long silence; he went on puffing at his pipe till a new name from his childhood occurred to his sluggish memory.

But of his own life and experiences he never told them a word! And what experiences that man must have had during his strange, romantic life as a gold-digger—sudden wealth, extravagance, crushed hopes, revolver play, fighting, murder, his life in his own hands, a fortune depending on a single call at poker, courtesans in silken gowns, poverty, starvation. . . . But he never told them a word about it all!

Instead, he would ask the mathematician:

"By the way, Carl, there used to be a girl called Julia Persson. Do you remember her?"

"Yes, of course! She married a supernumerary teacher, and lives at Strängnäs now, where he has a job."

Uncle Fredrik sucked his pipe for a long time.

"Oh, she got married, did she?"

"I seem to remember your fighting for her once," said the mathematician.

Uncle Fredrik shook his head.

"Did I? I don't suppose it was serious. I've never cared much about girls."

"You've never thought of marrying again since you became a widower?"

Uncle Fredrik shook his head long and slowly.

"No, there's been no room for women in my life."

But about this life of his—what it had meant to be and had been in reality—not a word. Had he sacrificed everything for an idea, and if so, what idea? And had he suc-

ceeded or failed? Did he mean to settle down in his own country, or was he still seeking fortune in the form in which he had always sought it? The mathematician had several times expressed his astonishment at Uncle Fredrik's silence on this point. His luggage afforded as little material for guesswork as the fact that he had arrived first class.

He remained in his native town till a few days after the New Year, when he was to accompany his aged parents to the town where Uncle Per lived. The evening before he, his brother and the old lacemaker were sitting in the mathematician's room after supper. Old Fru Lekholm was tired and had gone to bed already. The mathematician's wife was busy with household affairs. But the boys sat or hung, according to their age, on chairs in the mathematician's room to listen to the leisurely conversation. At last the mathematician got up, went to the stove and stood with his back to it and his arms crossed on his breast.

"Well, Fredrik, when you've seen brother Per, what do you mean to do next?"

Fredrik took his pipe out of his mouth.

"Well, I'll go to Stockholm for a bit. I've never seen the place. And then . . . Well, when I took my ticket home I'd thought of settling down at home for good. I'm getting on in years. But there's nothing else to be done but go back again."

"Aren't you happy here? Do you think you've been away too long?"

Uncle Fredrik stroked his moustache.

"No, it's not that exactly. I can be happy anywhere, on the whole. In Klondyke or California or New Mexico. And Sweden, too, for that matter. But there's something I've found out in this time here. I've had damned bad luck all my life. I scraped a little together at the diggings. Then I became a gardener in New Mexico. I did well at that. I

joined a Dutchman—I mean a German. Then came the rush to Klondyke. I sold my share to the Dutchman—I mean the German, and went there. Same bad luck. I had to begin again as a gardener. I did better and better at that. I became quite comfortably off, and extended my plant. But it wasn't what I'd meant to do at first—nor afterwards either, for that matter. Well, six months ago a man came up to me one day as I stood on my land and wanted to buy it and the land round about I'd bought to extend my plant. And he offered me such a big sum that I thought the fellow was stark mad. I laughed in his face. So I said, more as a joke than anything else, 'All right, you take it!' The man had actually got the contract in his pocket, and it was signed there and then. And before the ink was dry on the damned contract he said: 'That was a good joke.' Then he said: 'My son, do you know there is oil on your land, just outside your plant? Oil for about half a million greenbacks.'"

Uncle Fredrik puffed slowly at his pipe:

"Well, you can understand, Carl, that that broke me. I'd been running after gold all my life. Of course I'd heard of oil, and read about it. But you see, Carl, I'd never *thought* in terms of oil. You understand what I mean. I'd only thought in terms of *gold*, but not oil. Oil hadn't taken my fancy, as they say over there. And there I had been stumping about my plant with half a million of oil inside the fence; carrying on with my job without thinking of oil instead of gold for a single moment. And so I made up my mind and came home. I was broken down—felt that fate was against me. I meant to settle down here for good and all. I've money enough to have an easy time for the rest of my life. But now I've begun to think in terms of oil too. And it'd be the very devil——"

He bit his pipe-stem hard.

"Well, when I've been to Stockholm I'm going back again. I'll never be easy in my mind till I do."

There was a long silence. The swift turning of the mathematician's quid betrayed his impatience with this brother of his who could never have more than one thought in his brain at once.

"Hm!" he said, "my dear Fredrik; I don't know anything about it, and so I can't advise you."

Uncle Fredrik looked at him.

"Advise me? I've always decided for myself. But there's something else I've been thinking about since the first evening we three sat together and you told me about Anders's suicide. If I'd known what was happening to him, and all the trouble he was in, I could have helped him. If I'd been over here, I'd just have sent along the money."

There was complete silence—a long, oppressive, painful silence.

But suddenly—no one knew exactly how it had happened, for all were ruminating over what Uncle Fredrik had just said—suddenly the old lacemaker had rushed at Karl's father. He had seized him by the collar with both hands and was shaking him slowly backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards.

"You're fratricides, that's what you are! You're fratricides, you and Per!"

Karl Lekholm's father, who had inherited his mother's height and was more than a head taller than his old father, stood quite still and let himself be shaken. He only said:

"Go out of the room, boys!"

And Karl and his brothers slouched out of the room in silence, one behind the other.

Next morning the mathematician's family saw the old lacemaker, grandmamma and Uncle Fredrik off by train. The lacemaker wept. Now, at the last moment, he regretted his

decision to leave the town of his forefathers, where several generations of Lekholms had plied their honourable craft. But old grandmamma, in a new bonnet and a new black cloak with fur round the neck, took a dignified farewell of the friends who had come to see her off. Uncle Fredrik was unmoved.

The stationmaster, who had been at school with Uncle Fredrik, saluted them all three with his flag, put his whistle to his lips and gave the signal for departure. . . .

For Dr. Holmes, as has been said, Uncle Fredrik's visit was a turning-point in his life. Consciously and subconsciously his mind was constantly occupied with the lessons he had learned that Christmas. And some years later, when he was in the lower seventh, these lessons took the shape of a Swedish essay on hero-worship and the influence a hero's noble example can have on mankind in general. In this essay, in poetical, highly coloured language, the schoolboy upheld the view that a hero was in reality a quite ordinary, everyday person who, by a caprice of fate, the vagaries of chance, his own spiritual unrest, or of set purpose, has been placed in an unusual situation and has performed deeds which in the given situation were perfectly natural. This everyday individual became a hero in the eyes of people who had never witnessed such events, simply on account of the distance that separated them.

The essay gave rise to a long discussion in the class-room between the reader in Swedish and young Lekholm. In this discussion the latter indisputably came off worst, partly on account of his insufficiency as a dialectician, partly for the simple reason that he was wrong.

As for Uncle Fredrik, he returned to America to make his thoughts of oil a concrete fact. He took Uncle Anders's two eldest sons, Anders and Henrik, with him to the foreign land of great possibilities.

XIV

After Uncle Anders's death, it seemed as if the Deity in His all-wisdom had ordered His emissaries to abstain from chastising His faithful servant lacemaker Lekholm and all his house. Indeed, to judge from the rich harvest of blessings these years bore, it was as though He, the Almighty, had found that He had treated the Lekholms too hardly, and, to make good the wrongs they had suffered, had taken special care to let the sun of His grace shine on the old lacemaker and his family.

So, at least, the old gentleman himself interpreted the gifts which rained down in abundance upon his two sons Per and Carl, like manna from heaven.

The way in which good fortune, after an absence of many years, again crossed the Lekholms's threshold was nothing less than miraculous. Uncle Per's wife, who had lain under the curse of barrenness for nearly twenty years, now presented him, on the threshold of old age, with two children.

First a son was born to him. Lektor Waldenström himself left his parliamentary duties specially to christen the boy in the mission house, which was crowded not only with members of the community but with many other inhabitants of the town, who desired by their presence to show their loved and respected fellow-citizen the pleasure his unexpected good fortune had given them.

The son was christened Peter Paul.

A daughter was born two years later, and was christened Maria Elisabeth. On this occasion, too, Waldenström performed the ceremony. But the mathematician, who had attended both christenings, related on his return that the great man of God and politician had jestingly remarked, at the meal which followed the baptism, that Per Lekholm

could not count on his presence in future *every* time God bestowed His blessing on him *in this form*.

Soon after Peter Paul's birth it became clear to all that fatherhood had effected a transformation in Uncle Per's mentality which might also, in some degree, be regarded as a miracle. Uncle Per, who hitherto had despised all those who hankered after worldly things and had more than once been involved in acute controversy on the subject with the members of his community, one day surprised his fellow-creatures by buying a house. Nor was it a small house. It had what might be described as a commanding position at the corner of Storgatan and the park, had two stories, with one long row of windows looking on to Storgatan and another on to the park, and had previously been inhabited exclusively by people of quality—officers in the infantry regiment stationed in the town, doctors and senior officials. He himself moved into a few rooms in this house and let two rooms looking on to the yard to his aged parents, where, freed from financial anxiety, they could quietly compose the disagreements of a long married life. To give the exterior of the house a distinction fully corresponding to its dominating position, Uncle Per had a small top floor added just at the corner, adorned with a copper-roofed turret in the best architectural style of the nineties.

What share Uncle Per's wife, who had been mentally stimulated by her new motherhood, had in this purchase it is unnecessary to inquire. But there is no question that it had the most far-reaching effects on his material existence. Before concluding the deal, he had applied to the local branch of the Malmö Bank in order (ignorant as he was of all business outside his own restricted field, the carpentering and furniture branch) to obtain some information and advice. During this and subsequent conversations with the new bank manager, who during his short residence in the town had hitherto heard him spoken of only as a universally respected

dissenter, Per Lekholm displayed an eye for business so uncommonly acute and far-seeing that the bank manager was very soon quite decided upon one point: this is a devilish smart fellow, and we must have him on the board at all costs.

The bank manager, of course, did not overlook the circumstance that, by making sure of Uncle Per, the bank would gradually obtain a new and by no means to be despised clientèle in the town and its neighbourhood—the adherents of Waldenström, who were particularly numerous in those parts, and formed a respectable, capable, thrifty and, in the mass, wealthy community. Hitherto most of them had favoured the Provincial Bank, but he, the bank manager, would not be the sharp fellow he thought himself if Herr Lekholm's immense prestige among the brethren did not attract them to his bank. And the increased custom which the bank thus secured could not possibly have more than one consequence for him, the bank manager—his transference to a larger branch.

Although Uncle Per and Uncle Carl met so seldom, they had corresponded actively for many years. This had originally been necessitated by all the financial trouble the musician had caused himself and them; and from this necessity the two uncommunicative, reserved brothers had derived a habit of writing to one another about their own personal affairs. And the habit had, in turn, established a confidential relationship between them in matters in which they knew that they could meet on a common ground of straight, manly rectitude—the family's material affairs.

A few months after Uncle Per had informed his brother of the purchase of the house, there came one afternoon a very long letter. The mathematician read it aloud that evening at table, after supper. Against the true inclination of his heart, in contradiction to the principles to which hitherto he had rigidly adhered, and after long meditation, Uncle Per

had given way to the universal, strongly expressed desire of his fellow-inhabitants that he should join the board of the local branch of the Malmö Bank. Members of his own community had endeavoured to persuade him. The governor of the province himself had repeatedly attempted to influence him. He had given way to the pressure of this universal desire. He would not conceal from his brother that this meant for him an entrance into the business world, which had long tempted him, and that he felt that he was at a turning-point in his life. It was, therefore, ten times more important than it had been before never for a moment to lose sight of the one essential of life—the Saviour Who suffered and died for us on the Cross.

When the mathematician had read this letter, he said:

"It's what I've always said: Per has always stood in the way of his own success in the world. He could have been a rich man by now if he'd liked. But he may go far still, though he's nearly in the fifties, once he's tasted blood."

XV

But the mathematician and his family prospered also.

One Thursday, a few weeks after Peter Paul's birth, he came home to dinner looking more severe than usual, with a parcel under his arm. He went straight to his bedroom and locked himself in. Not even his wife was allowed to enter. She knocked at the door several times to say that dinner was on the table. But each time he replied curtly: "I'm coming as soon as I can. You sit down."

The others sat down in silence. There had been so many disasters in the family: a remorseless destiny still hung like a heavy thundercloud over their heads, and it was with a tinge of fatalistic insensibility that they waited for the father of the family in silence, and wondered what could have hap-

pened. Aunt Charlotte was in the asylum at Lund. Uncle Anders's bones had lain in unconsecrated soil for nearly a year. The sons looked at their mother. They felt that she was thinking: Was it not enough? Would the Lekholms never, never have peace? Would there never, never be an end to their misfortunes? Would they never have time to straighten their backs like other people? Would they always be compelled to go through life hunched up, in fear of blows from above? And whom had the blow struck now? Was Peter Paul dead? Had he met with the same fate as his brothers and sisters many years ago?

At last the key was turned in the lock of the bedroom door, and the mathematician stood on the threshold. He had changed his clothes and was in civilian dress, as on a Sunday. He stood quite motionless, stiffly at attention, sloping arms with the parcel which he had been carrying under his arm and which now, under the thin wrapping-paper, revealed the shape of a stout bottle. He stood quite motionless and looked from one to the other with a curious, imbecile stare and his mouth wide open, as if he had suddenly gone out of his mind. His wife and sons gave him a swift, nervous glance, without saying anything, without daring to ask.

"Now," he said at last, "is no one going to congratulate me?"

His wife looked at him.

"Oh, dear Carl, don't frighten us! I really can't bear it any longer."

The mathematician sloped arms again with the bottle-like parcel, and to the astonishment and terror of all present, he goose-stepped the few steps to the table, bent over his wife and kissed her. It was the first time the boys had seen him do such a thing, and they looked down stiffly at their plates.

"Lady and gentlemen," he said, "from the first of next month I leave the army and begin a new life as treasurer to the town finance committee. What do you say to that?"

He clapped his heels together again, sloped arms once more with the parcel, put it carefully on the floor beside his chair, and sat down at the table.

They all looked at him as he stuffed his napkin under his chin.

"Yes," he said, "stare your eyes out of your sockets if you like. It's true anyhow. I can tell you now that there's been talk of it for some months. Old Lundquist's getting too old. Besides, the whole system of accounts is to be remodelled. And so they, that is to say Jönzén, have offered me the post. I didn't want to say anything before. There's no object in useless talk. But now it's all fixed up. I've applied for my discharge to-day and been given leave till I get it. You'll never see me in uniform again. Of course I get a reduced pension from the regiment, but my salary as treasurer is three times my present pay—*three times. Ut supra in fidem.* Carl Lekholm."

There was still silence at the table.

"Well," he said after a moment or two, "aren't you going to congratulate me?"

"Yes," his sons answered hesitatingly. But they said no more; for at that moment their mother burst into tears. She leaned one elbow on the table and put her hands before her eyes, while tears of joy ran down her cheeks into the Thursday peas in her plate which were rapidly growing cold.

"You frightened me so, Carl," she sobbed. "I shall never understand your jokes. When I saw you standing in the parlour door, I thought of poor Charlotte. I thought you had gone out of your mind. I thought my heart would turn to stone. So many things have happened. . . ."

The mathematician's face grew dark for a moment, and he shrugged his shoulders almost imperceptibly.

"Women don't understand men and men don't understand women. And they are two in one. I felt cheerful for

once in my life. I felt, as I came home, walking the streets in uniform for the last time in my life, that life was having a bit of a joke with me. And so I wanted to have a joke myself. And I thought of this. And I only frightened you! But you can forgive me that. Look here!"

He took a little black jewel-case out of his pocket and opened it. It was a brooch of blood-red garnets which formed seven stars. He handed it to her with a slight air of embarrassment. And at the same time he said:

"For Heaven's sake, Maria, don't thank me whatever you do, or I'll blush. Besides, I've got something else here."

He took up the bottle-like parcel, tore off the wrapping-paper, and held in his hand a bottle of champagne.

"We haven't any champagne glasses yet. But we must buy some for Lars's matriculation. We'll have to drink this out of beer glasses. It's the first time wine like this has been drunk in this house. But it's going to be drunk to-day for certain reasons."

His wife looked at him.

"But, Carl, we're not going to drink champagne with pork and peas?"

"That's just what we are going to do. We're going to drink it with pork and peas. At least the first bottle which is drunk in our home. One might say that the combination is symbolic for us. *Per aspera ad astra*, it used to run when I learnt Latin. And I suppose it still does. And those words might very well be our life's motto, Maria. Dinner-party wine with everyday food. And now, while you're putting on the brooch, I'll uncork the bottle and we'll have some speech-making."

The boys' mother stuck the brooch in her vyella blouse with trembling fingers, and the champagne cork flew out with a pop. The mathematician poured out wine for her and himself. He poured out for the boys, too. Lars, who was to be a student in a few weeks, got a half-glass, Karl

and Sven a third and a quarter respectively, and Tage, who was only ten, a few drops to drink healths with. He worked it all out mathematically, measuring with his eye. Then the newly appointed treasurer tapped his glass.

"Yes, my boys, now we're going to drink mother's health and thank her that we're where we are. It's her doing more than mine. Dear Maria, we thank you with all our hearts. We beg you to forgive us for . . . I beg you to forgive me for all my hardness, for all that I know you've put down to insensibility and lack of affection in me, dear Maria, I beg . . . I beg . . . you . . . it wasn't for want of love——"

He could say no more. His face began to twitch, and he suddenly rose and disappeared into his room.

But their mother did not weep. She only smiled. She sat looking straight in front of her, with her eyes still shining from the tears she had shed a little while before. Her sons glanced shyly at her.

It was as though an entirely new woman had taken the place where she had been sitting a few moments before, a young woman who resembled a faded portrait in the photograph album, representing their mother at the time of her engagement. The face of the woman who now sat there was certainly as worn as their mother's; the cheeks were sunken, the forehead as wrinkled. But her eyes and her smile revealed a soul that for years and years had been buried under a mountain of toil and daily worries, and now, suddenly awakened by the falter in another's voice, was listening, wondering and expectant, to the implied confession.

Their father was out of the room a long time. When at last he came back he smelt of eau-de-Cologne, with which he had been bathing his face. He was quite himself again, and said in his normal tone of command:

"Now we'll drink mother's health, boys."

They raised their glasses awkwardly and looked at her.

The smile had gone. Her eyes had lost their brightness and were as tired and dull as before; the spell was broken; she had become twenty years older again in a few seconds. She passed her hand over her eyes once or twice, as though trying to brush away a dream or a vision which had clung to her eyelashes like a flying spider's web.

"No," she said, "now we'll congratulate father instead, children!"

After dinner father and mother shut themselves into his room. It was, no doubt, the new future they were talking of, the new and wonderful possibilities which at one stroke had been revealed to them and their children. It was the key to the door Sesame which was being tested; the shining treasures of which they could catch a glimpse inside, and which, to judge from the papers the mathematician had left on his writing-table, had been estimated in his beautifully formed figures.

The boys, too, held a conclave that evening in their rooms on the other side of the lobby. Their lessons were left to look after themselves. What had happened was more marvellous than the miracles in the legends. Their father was no longer a non-commissioned officer. He need no longer stand at attention before every young lieutenant with his hand raised to the peak of his cap. He was a free man. The world and the community had at last discovered what a fine fellow their father was, and by making him treasurer to the finance committee had paid a tribute to obvious justice which had been lacking all these years.

A few weeks later the champagne cork popped again in the mathematician's home. It was the first Saturday in June, and his eldest son had matriculated that day. The goal was reached. The old lacemaker's dream had become a reality. It had taken the work of a whole generation to make his

brag a living truth. Two human beings, a man and a woman, had toiled and moiled, calculated and denied themselves for twenty years to help a lad of hardly eighteen to a life in better conditions and of greater possibilities. But now the goal was reached! Lars Lekholm stood that day where his father had once dreamed of standing, many years before.

The mathematician himself had been down to the school yard to meet him. His wife had not dared to go. One never knew—the improbable might happen. . . . Besides, she was not sure of herself; she did not know whether she could control herself at the moment when the school doors opened and the crowd streamed out. . . . That day meant so much for her, more than for most of the other mothers who now shared her nervousness.

But the mathematician was sure of himself; and he went. He had placed himself at the fence of the governor's garden, right in front of a white lilac bush in flower. He looked very "cross," more serious than usual, as serious as he used to look when some misfortune had afflicted the family, and only then. He turned his quid rapidly and spat quickly now and again, with his eyes immovably fixed on the shut doors of the school. When anyone passed, or greeted him with a few friendly words, he started, raised his hat nervously and spat. Hidden behind his back he held an ebony stick with a crook of wrought silver bearing a monogram and a date, and he looked as if he meant to spring upon his son and give him a thrashing the moment he came within range.

When the doors were thrown wide open and the white-capped band came crowding out, he remained at his post, with his sinewy neck at full stretch, with his cold grey eyes peering into the cluster. Then a solitary student elbowed his way out of the chaos of hurrahs and flowers and went quietly to the spot where his father was waiting for him by arrangement—a tall, fair-haired boy with down on his chin.

The mathematician took the stick from its place of concealment behind his back, felt it once or twice, weighed it in his hand and gave it to him.

"Well," he said with a smile, "you've scraped your way through, anyhow. Congratulations. I suppose you were one of the last?"

"No, not exactly. I think I came out first or second."

His father turned his quid.

"That's what I expected of you, my boy. We must hurry home now. Mother is so anxious."

But before they left the school yard they were stopped by a crowd of men in uniform—the mathematician's old comrades. They saluted and shook hands with the newly made student.

"You're the first of our boys to put on the white cap," they said. "Ours will follow you. But you're the first. We congratulate you and wish you all possible luck."

"Yes," his father answered with a grim smile, "he's really scraped through. But it must have been a near thing."

And so they went home, father and son, with the two next boys on each side and Tage running in front like a dog. The lobby door was locked, against the mathematician's express order. He fumbled for the bunch of keys in his trousers pocket and at last opened the door.

"What can be wrong with mother, that she doesn't come out to meet us?" he said.

He jerked the parlour door open. And there she stood, stiff and straight, looking at her eldest son. Her face was as white as chalk; she stretched out her hands towards him, her fingers trembled, and her lips moved, but she stood in perfect silence, unable to utter a word of greeting. Then she passed her hand over her forehead and eyes and sank down on a chair.

They all rushed forward to help her.

"What is it? What in Heaven's name? Maria—mother!"

She shook her head.

"I don't know. I feel so fun——"

The mathematician rushed out into the dining-room, uncorked the champagne bottle and came back with a glass, a real champagne-glass, as tall and narrow as a flower-vase.

"Look here, take this—wait, I'll help you—drink this . . . it'll make you better, you'll see it will. . . ."

She sipped from the glass, pushed it gently away and stretched out her hand as if feeling for something.

"Where are you, Lars? . . . My Lars. . . . Come here. . . . I want to feel your hand. . . . I feel as if I'd been right away from you. . . ."

In half an hour she was herself again. They stood in a group round the table with the new champagne glasses in their hands. The mathematician raised his glass and said:

"Yes, my boy! We have never spoken of your future till now. There's no sense in unnecessary talk. Matriculation was the first stage; and each stage has to be taken separately. But now it's time to talk to you about your future. And now I have a piece of news to give you, which will come as a surprise even to your mother. I don't know at all what you've thought you'd most like to be. But now I want to say to you that you can choose whatever career you like! On one, but a very important condition—that your conduct yourself well. On that condition your mother and I will meet the cost of your training as a lawyer or school-master or doctor, or whatever you want to be. Without doing any injury to your younger brothers, we will try and arrange for you to study till your training is finished without financial worry. But now I've got a surprise even for your mother. I think I've noticed that you've leanings towards a military career. *You can become an officer if you like.* You can't join the regiment here. You wouldn't be taken, seeing that you're the son of an N.C.O. in the regi-

ment. And even if you were taken, they'd make you feel in one way or another that your father had started in the ranks. But I think they'd take you in a north-country regiment. I even think the colonel would put in a good word for you if I asked him. If you want to be an officer you may. If so, you've a few weeks in which to make your decision. Perhaps it's madness on my part to encourage you in that direction. But seeing how much better off I've become, well—God bless you! So long as you lead a simple, sober, hard-working life—your health!”

The mathematician's eldest son had already come rigidly to attention and acknowledged the toast in military style by immediately lowering his emptied glass to the level of his third waistcoat button.

His wife looked at him with an astonished stare. This was his revenge, her husband's revenge for all those years. It was madness. It was contrary to all sound reason, to all the calculations he had hitherto made, to their mutual agreements, to his view of the military profession and an officer's existence, to all that he had till now impressed upon his children as regards the purpose and aims of life. And now there he stood, urging his own son to enter the army! As if he himself thought for a single moment that Lars, careful and decent lad as he was, could avoid temptation and live a simple, sober, hard-working life as an officer! He who knew himself what went on in the mess and outside. . . . It was madness! It meant sending their own child into a life of misconduct, debts and misery! It was madness! But it was revenge, too—his revenge for all these years in which he had worn the king's uniform. And there was something else—something she now discovered for the first time in this uncommunicative, reserved man whose wife she had been for so many years. She stared at him darkly in boundless astonishment and gave expression to her thought:

"Taken all in all, you're a typical Lekholm. In your heart of hearts you're your father's son. . . ."

Now it was the mathematician's turn to stare at his wife.

"*I like my father?*"

He shook his head several times, completely at a loss.

"I really can't see any likeness. . . ."

His wife nodded, curtly and decisively:

"I haven't till now, either. But *now* I do!"

It is possible that the mathematician, in his calculations for Lars's future, had reckoned with one of the wealthy marriages so common among officers as a solution of an economic problem which would become more and more involved as the years passed. If so, he would have been obliged to nourish the most serious apprehensions for his son's future had he been able to see him in the park an hour after the health-drinking and speech-making.

With money he had earned in the course of the year he had bought an engagement ring, and this ring, on a bench in a summer-house surrounded by lilac in blossom, he placed on Fröken Gurli Svensson's finger, swearing as he did so eternal love and fidelity.

Fröken Gurli Svensson was then in the eighth class of the girls' school. She was daughter to a private coach, who did not possess, never had possessed, and never had any prospect of possessing, a single öre beyond what was needed to keep his family alive.

Gurli Svensson and Lars Lekholm had been secretly engaged for several years—in fact, since Lars Lekholm was in the upper seventh. Their union was now further sealed by this engagement ring, imported from Malmö for secrecy's sake, which he placed on her finger on absolute condition that she would not show it to a living soul and only wear it at night, when no one could see her.

Gurli Svensson gave her solemn promise. And what was

more remarkable, she kept it—faithfully! For she was like that, in her love and her loyalty.

The day after his matriculation Lars was sent by his father to the regimental doctor.

Lars was to be examined in view, not only of his future career, but also of life insurance. At breakfast the mathematician explained to his sons the enormous importance of life insurance, both in general and with particular reference to the Lekholm family and its history. The absence of life insurance had played a decisive and tragic part in the family drama. If, for example, Uncle Oscar, the wastrel and dandy, had had sufficient sense of responsibility to insure his life, or if his father the lacemaker, that incurable optimist, had had foresight enough to take out a life insurance policy in Oscar's name corresponding to the sums he had been foolish enough to lend him, the family finances and fortunes would have been entirely different.

It was, of course, true, as the mathematician pointed out, that the idea of life insurance was not then as familiar as it had become in their day. But it had existed for some twenty years at any rate. What he wished to impress upon his sons was this: life was really such a simple matter that with only a small degree of foresight and sense of responsibility, and exact punctuality in the payment of premiums, the cruellest weapons could be wrested from the hands of disaster, and at least the most superfluous blows of a blind fate warded off. In the mathematician's opinion, if the ten commandments were revised in future, the fifth ought to contain a clause making the taking out of a life insurance policy an integral part of the honouring of one's father and mother.

So Lars was ordered to present himself before the regimental doctor at ten o'clock the same morning. The mathematician had already mentioned the matter to the doctor.

He had also spoken to the doctor about his wife and her

little attack of giddiness. It had certainly passed off at once. But he wondered if it would not be best to have her examined.

But his wife refused absolutely. She would not go to any doctor. She had felt unwell in the same way several times before. It was not real giddiness; it was stomach trouble, and had nothing whatever to do with the heart. . . .

The mathematician was of the same opinion. Besides, she was a woman; and women were specially constituted, quite unlike men. That was to say, men's physical failings were, so to speak, more logical, more calculable. In a man, an attack of dizziness meant that the time had come when he must pay for the sins of his youth; it was, in fact, the first serious warning. But a woman need only be subjected to a little extra emotional strain to turn up the whites of her eyes and look as if her last hour had come.

"Besides," his wife said, "I shall be able to rest now and take things a little more quietly."

XVI

Yes, now she would be able to rest and take things quietly. And she needed to rest.

She had borne her husband four sons in eight years, kept house for him, cooked, mended clothes, darned, woven, sewed, scrubbed, polished—in the first years of her marriage alone, later with the help of some young girl from the country, who as a rule left the moment she had learnt her duties. In addition to this, the mathematician's wife had had the regimental mending for fifteen years through her husband. Two days in the week she spent cutting out privates' shirts and making drawers and socks, which were then given out to poor widows and necessitous spinsters in the town for completion. The few poor hundred-kronor notes she hon-

estly earned in this manner were placed in the bank to help her sons, when their time came, to a brighter and easier future than had been their parents' lot.

As long as Dr. Holmes could remember, his mother had never had a moment to herself, from a quarter to six in the morning, when the boys had to be woken and sent to school, to half-past eleven at night, when she crept into the big mahogany bed and fell into so heavy a sleep that she often did not even wake when her spouse, an hour or two later, had finished his work for the day and stretched himself out at her side.

And yet this life of toil had not affected her mentally. She was always the same—low-voiced, definite, sparing of words, resourceful, resolute. There was no suggestion of strain about her ways or manner. She was one of those women who, amid the worst household turmoil, only need take off their apron, turn down their sleeves and smooth their hair to give an unexpected visitor the impression that they have only been interrupted in the preparation of a sweet.

Certainly her cheeks were sunken. But as she had never been a beauty—despite her regular features, her straight short nose, her broad low forehead, the oval of her face and a chin of feminine softness—her sunken cheeks and her thin form made the impression of being constitutional rather than an indication of prematurely faded womanhood. There was still a gleam of sunshine and youth in her rich fair hair, worn in a heavy knot on her neck. And her deep-set blue eyes, which generally had a tired look, could shine up and reveal glimpses of a placid, meditative life, directed by reason rather than by feeling—the mirror of a quiet, balanced, somewhat melancholy spirit.

She was the daughter of a clergyman, who had died suddenly a few years after he had obtained a living and left his

family—a widow, one daughter and two sons—with an extra year of grace beyond the usual one in which to pay off the remaining part of the debts he had accumulated as a student and to make some provision for their own future. And she was in many respects a typical clergyman's daughter, intended by nature to develop from a fair young bud in an idyllic country vicarage into the commanding, matronly, humorous, practically religious wife of a rural dean.

But instead she had married the mathematician. And all the qualities which lay hid within the bud had, in the leaner soil and less sunny atmosphere to which she had been transplanted, developed into but pale reflections of what nature had intended. The authority the rural dean's wife wielded at home and abroad, in farm, cottage and poor-house, had shrunk into willingness and patience to listen to all the complaints over the wretchedness of life and the caprices of fate in which the poor women of the town used to indulge when they came to fetch or leave the soldiers' drawers and shirts. The portliness had been atrophied. She was still as little, slim and fragile as in the photograph in the album on the parlour table, taken at the time of her engagement, and all the rest in the world could not give her the double-chin, ample bosom, swaying hips and comfortable *embonpoint* of the rural dean's wife.

Her humour, too, had been checked in its free growth—that special feminine humour which meets one at the door of every vicarage in the country, the healthy, purifying product of daily companionship with the weakness of a servant of the Lord. The humour had not, like the portliness, been atrophied, for humour is one of the rare spiritual plants which never let themselves be completely stifled. It had adapted itself to the less favourable surroundings and, after creeping along dark, crooked tunnels, reached the light of day in the form of intellectual satire and irony. It had lost the cast-iron security of the vicarage. In the home

of the mathematician-atheist it had become a religion in the land of the heathen, continually exposed to the brutality of logic, the seductions of common sense and the persistency of proselytism. A religion which always had to be ready to shift its tents, wandering eternally in the sandstorm-swept deserts of atheism; compelled every Sunday afternoon—the only one at her disposal—to try to strengthen its position by reading, to arm itself against the literature from which the infidel derived his modern wisdom—his theory of a miserable human race, which had a gorilla for its father instead of God, and was inspired by the greedy egotism of a wild beast in the place of the Holy Spirit.

How she and the mathematician got on together as a married couple their sons did not know. They were both quiet and sparing of words. When the two eldest boys, Lars and Karl, had reached the age at which Strindberg's theory that married life was a hell upon earth was debated by the mature gentlemen of the gymnasium, they often discussed their parents' life and endeavoured to interpret it as a regular Strindbergian hell of hatred, that being in their eyes the most modern and highly cultured form of legal connection between man and woman. Certainly their mother and father hated one another! Sometimes they surprised their mother sitting and weeping. They had preserved, too, from their earliest childhood a few faint memories of her coming into their room in the middle of the night, kissing them on the forehead and then disappearing for several days. Their father had explained to them that she had been summoned to her mother, who had suddenly been taken ill. What had really happened they never knew: but it was the sort of thing that happened in Strindberg! A schoolboy could understand that. Once when Karl, now Charles Holmes, had surprised her crying, he had gone up to her, stroked her cheek and tried to console her.

"Has father been unkind to you again?" he had asked.

But he never tried to console her again: for she had turned him straight out of the bedroom with the words:

"Go away! You're not to say an unkind word about your father; he's the best man in all the world!"

But this outburst, too, was typically Strindbergian, and further confirmed the boys' theory that her marriage with the mathematician was really up to date in every respect.

The two eldest brothers' speculations as to the relations between their parents had this amount of justification—that even an impartial observer could not help being astonished not so much at their marriage having endured, for most unhappy marriages did in those days, but at the fact that the two had ever come together as two people must come together for the thought of marriage ever to arise. They seemed so utterly different in very way. They had really nothing in common since the remote date when craftsmanship and agriculture went different ways and created the different mentalities of peasant and bourgeois.

And yet the explanation was simple enough. The mathematician gave it to his sons one evening some years later.

It was romance pure and simple.

Once, as a young sergeant, the mathematician had gone to her part of the country on manœuvres and had been billeted in the vicarage where her mother was spending the first year of grace. He had come there in command of the battery's ammunition column, with high boots, sword and revolver; on horseback, with men and wagons behind him. He rode across the garden, with its big chestnut which was just shedding its leaves, reined in before the front steps, embowered in crimson virginia creeper, spurred his horse to make it curvet, and called: "Is anyone in?"

Then she had come out, small, slight and pale, with big, rather frightened blue eyes and fair, wavy hair that hung down her back in a long plait. He had raised his hand to his cap, spurred his horse again to make it curvet still more

elegantly, and taken a paper from the breast pocket of his dusty tunic.

He, his men and his horses were to be billeted there for twenty-four hours. The rest of the battery was down at the squire's. He promised to cause as little inconvenience as possible. She had looked at the paper and up again at the man on the prancing horse; he was as dusty as a tramp, but a pair of flashing steel-grey eyes shone in the brown, weather-beaten face, on which the dry dust still lay in streaks, the fair moustache was brushed upwards in martial style, and the chin protruded, manly and resolute, above the tight chin-strap. She had blushed and turned pale again, just as the poets will have it, and said:

"If you'll wait a minute, lieutenant, I'll tell mother."

He corrected her mistake as to his rank later in the evening, when her mother asked him to supper at the vicarage. He knew that his life's happiness might and probably would be destroyed if he pointed out the error. But he *had* to; he was already head over ears in love with her. He had said:

"Please don't call me lieutenant, ladies. I'm only a sergeant."

Early next morning he rode off at the head of the ammunition column. A marvel had taken place, something he had not dared hope for: she had got up and served coffee for him in the dining-room. And it was after he had experienced that marvel that his resolution was formed: when he reached the end of the chestnut avenue which led up to the vicarage he turned in his saddle and swore: She or none!

He wrote to her for a year and a half. Then, at the end of the extra year of grace, she and her mother moved into town. The boys were going to school, and the widow was to try to keep herself and them by taking paying guests. A year later the mathematician and the clergyman's daughter were married—against the will of her family. Not that the

widow and her brother, who was himself a clergyman, had ever heard anything but good of him. But they were unwilling to give Maria to a man who had lived in barracks among rough soldiers for several years. Besides, what future could there be in marriage with a man who could never get any higher than he was, however efficient he might be? They had nothing to live on but the scanty pay of a non-commissioned officer. And he was a freethinker into the bargain. "Toil and labour, misery and poverty, that's what it'll be," her mother had prophesied. But the little fair-haired girl with the deep, serious blue eyes, who one autumn afternoon had fallen in love with a dashing warrior on a prancing horse, whom she had taken for a lieutenant, would not listen to reason. She joined her fate with that of a man who, in addition to perfect faithfulness, could promise her only one thing—that their sons should be students. And there was a spice of revenge in that promise for her too.

Her life *had* been toil and labour. But now their eldest son was a student, and the others would follow him. And she herself would begin to take things quietly!

Although the mathematician's wife gave up the regimental sewing that summer, she had much to do in the months that followed.

Now the boys were to be equipped with sheets, pillow-cases and towels, everything a student takes with him when he leaves home and goes out into life.

Lars had been accepted as a volunteer in the Norrbotten Regiment. In two years it would be Karl's turn, two years later Sven's, and last of all Tage's. Would she see the day when the youngest won the white cap, she wondered? . . . She hardly thought so. She felt so tired, now when she was to begin to take things quietly. She did not seem able to do half what she could do before, now, when she was freed of

the sewing. No, she would never live to see the day when Tage came home with the white cap on. . . .

It was best to equip them all four at once; and it was the only right and just way too. If it was done so, there could be no favouritism. They should all have things of the same kind and at the same price. And the things should be of such quality that when they married their wives should need only to glance at the monogram to see what kind of mother she had been to her sons.

She had thought of weaving the linen herself; but before the loom was ready, she had a feeling that she could not do it. The blankets, however, she would make herself—blue in colour, warm, light and soft. And in the middle of each blanket a little heart should be worked containing the boys' initials—their mother's heart, which would warm them long after she herself was in her grave.

And there was another thing: if she did not weave the linen herself, she would have time to do some reading, not only on Sunday afternoons, which hitherto had been her only free time in the week, but every evening. She would read masses of books! and with them she would bombard Unbelief so heavily that at last it would beg for mercy, not from her, but from Him from whom all mercy comes. She would, before it was altogether too late, convince the atheist, with his own weapons of logic, that the human race was not descended from gorillas and orang-outangs, and that God's own voice spoke in men's hearts if they would only have ears to hear it.

It was a curious thing that the thought of death should be with her daily now, when she was to have rest and quiet. . . . And not only the thought of her own death, but a fear for her husband and his atheism, the need, that grew ever more urgent, of trying to convert him before—before what?

But of all this, of her weariness, her feeling that death

was near, of her anxiety to serve her husband because it was too late, she said nothing to him. Now and again she wrote a few words on the subject in letters to her brothers, who had now been vicars for a long time.

For the last four or five years the mathematician had rented one half of a villa in a fir-wood close to a fishery some twenty or thirty miles from the town. He had reckoned that sun, the air of the pine-woods and salt-water bathing would strengthen the boys' bodies and sharpen their intellects for new efforts in the next school year. "Remounts must be put out to grass if one wants to get the best out of them," he used to say.

He came out himself on Saturday evenings and spent Sunday fly-fishing with a few companions from the neighbouring villas. He could cast for twelve hours on end, swearing at the unreliability of the human eye and judgment in the use of strength. During his four weeks' holiday he instructed backward holiday makers in mathematics the whole morning. The lessons took place on the glass-roofed verandah, and mathematical formulæ echoed in the depths of the pine-wood. Right down on the white sands, where the boys and girls floundered in the shallow water, his curt, sharp question could be heard: "What is meant by a logarithm?"

But this summer, his first as treasurer, he took no holiday. He had to acquaint himself with so much that was new. He only came out for Saturdays and Sundays. Sunday was, as before, entirely devoted to fishing. But on Saturday evenings he and his wife used to sit on the glass-roofed verandah. They talked of the future. Happiness had come to their home at last, not as a casual and fleeting visitor, but as a member of the family. The time of family tragedies was over. The future lay before them like a sunshiny summer

morning. No, it was clearer. For him it took the form of a theory of heredity worked out on a mathematical basis. There was a man called Galton, in his opinion the greatest genius of the century along with Darwin. This Galton had formulated a law by which an individual's compound hereditary characteristics could be determined with almost mathematical accuracy, and hence, with only the slightest margin of error, his future. This brilliant genius, Galton, had discovered that to a child's individuality the parents contribute one-half, the four grandparents together one-quarter, and their parents in turn the remaining quarter.

"Do you understand?"

The mathematician wrote out his sons' heredity on a sheet of paper and showed his wife all the possibilities which might occur under Galton's law. As he reckoned it, their boys were on the whole on the safe side. That was to say—there was one black spot, which had already proved fatal in brother Anders's case; and that was the combination of the old lacemaker's incurable optimism and old Fru Lekholm's musical talent. But it should be observed that he, the mathematician, had inherited neither the lacemaker's unpardonable optimism nor his mother's musical talent. Assuming that this unlucky combination occurred in any of his sons, it would in any case form so small a part of his hereditary qualities—seeing that a man only inherited an eighth part from his grandparents on the father's side—that the combination would hardly do any decisive injury to the remaining seven-eighths of his individuality.

"Do you understand?"

But his wife only answered: "Do you know, Carl, I sometimes feel that I wish you might experience a real sorrow."

"What do you mean? Haven't I had sorrows in my life?"

She shook her head.

"Never a real sorrow, never a sorrow which has hit you really hard, so that for once in your life you have had to bow your head before God."

"And you wish me *that*? That's a kind wish, I must say."

She looked him seriously in the eyes.

"Yes, that's just what it is: a *kind wish*."

XVII

Her wish was fulfilled earlier than anyone could have guessed.

One day in late spring, the year after the mathematician had been appointed town treasurer, he came home to dinner declaring that he had a quite unique piece of news. His news, he said, affected the whole family and its future most immediately, and was—as all family news now habitually was—particularly pleasant. In the event of his wife being able to guess what it was she should receive by way of reward a fur-trimmed plush cloak from Augusta Lundin's in Stockholm, which, by chance, he had been offered for a song; while, if any of the boys succeeded in hitting the nail on the head, the lucky guesser would be presented with a krona piece.

The krona piece was taken from his purse simultaneously with the promise, displayed to his sons and placed for the time being beside the mathematician's plate. As regards the fur-trimmed plush cloak from Augusta Lundin's in Stockholm, his word had to be taken; but no one had ever doubted that yet.

The meal was finished without anyone having even brushed against the curtain behind which the mysterious news was concealed. They had guessed everything possible, from the first prize in the Danish class lottery to a new bicycle instead of the old one, which now, after having been

used by four brothers, was in such a state that not even Tage would mount it.

At last the mathematician put the krona back into his purse, expressed his pleasure at having saved the price of a fur-trimmed plush cloak, took a large envelope from his wallet and, with painful deliberation, produced a photograph. Holding it in his upraised right hand he displayed it to his family, whose patience had now reached breaking-point.

"What's this?"

"A house."

"It's a villa," the mathematician corrected. "Whom do you think that villa belongs to?"

No one could say.

"Well," the mathematician said, "from noon to-morrow that villa will be called 'Mariero' and will belong to Fru Maria Lekholm, *née* Brogren; it is presented to her by her good and faithful husband, Carl Lekholm, as a mark of his love and gratitude, and is intended to be owned and used by her as its new name indicates—as a resting-place for her during the remainder of her life. If she allows her hard and brutal husband to live under the same roof as herself, it was the giver's idea that Herr and Fru Lekholm should spend their old age in this villa like Philemon and Baucis, the aged couple in Ovid."

With these words he handed the photograph to his wife, adding:

"The inventory of this villa includes a fur-trimmed plush cloak from Augusta Lundin's in Stockholm. I hope you like it."

The boys had jumped up from their chairs and placed themselves behind their mother to look at the photograph. It showed a two-storied wooden villa, crenellated and towered, with gargoyled roof, glass verandah and porch, all in the finest architectural style of the nineties as applied

to summer villas, something between a mediæval castle and a restaurant. All this could be seen from the photograph.

But this stately, not to say monumental exterior was, the mathematician declared, nothing compared to the interior. There were no less than fourteen rooms, six of them on the upper floor; two passages; a staircase so wide that one could drive a gun-team up it; a pantry as spacious as if it had been meant for a hotel; large, lofty, light rooms, with stoves in the sitting-rooms so imposing and artistically ornamented that they were a pleasure to the eye—a chocolate-brown majolica stove in the dining-room, a white and gold one in the drawing-room, and so on. There was also a roomy outhouse with a loose box for a horse, and, *nota bene*, a hen-house with a stove in it!

“Mariero” stood in a commanding position fully corresponding to its splendid exterior and interior. It stood on a rise in the ground where two roads crossed, surrounded by a garden of two acres, certainly rather new, but with fruit-trees already bearing. Opposite its south front was the village shop with its life and movement. Behind the shop, in a grove of ancient chestnuts, rose the square, massive white church tower, and farther off lay the red-painted vicarage, covered with ivy and virginia creeper. The lady of the house, therefore, would not lack society. On the contrary, she would be restored to the atmosphere of her childhood; she would live only a stone’s throw from a charming country vicarage, like that from which he had taken her long ago. The church bells would ring the Sunday evening peace right into her room, as she sat in her armchair at the window.

It seemed that day, as they sat over their coffee longer than usual, that the mathematician had been endowed with the inexhaustible resources of a magician. It appeared, as he continued his account of “Mariero” and its position, that

the southern outlook could not remotely be compared with the view that met the eye from the windows on the north side, especially from the upper floor. This view, he declared with emphasis, was an absolute pearl, fully equal to anything that any other country in the world could offer. It was so beautiful that it must bring tears to the eyes of any man whose heart was not utterly hardened. He was willing to confess that he himself, as he stood at the window of the first-floor room which he already called Lars's room—each son was to have his own room on the first floor—yes, he said, as he stood up there and looked at the view and thought that he and Maria would soon call all this their own, he had had to take out his handkerchief. He had had a feeling in his breast which he had never known before in his life, and for which he could find no other expression than the childish word religious.

For where the fence of the garden of "Mariero" marked the frontier of his domains, there began (1) a meadow, sloping gently to (2) the river, which, thanks to a waterfall three or four feet high, whose noise could be heard through the open window, broadened into a lake with alder-clad banks, in which fish were declared to abound. On the other side of this lake-like pool lay (3) a fair-sized property, whose white main building was visible through the alders, (4) fields and meadows patched with clumps of trees and buildings, and rising gently to where (5) the woods towards the Småland border began, at first dark and jagged, then growing ever bluer till they finally melted far away into (6) the horizon.

The distance between the fence of "Mariero" and the edge of the woods he, as an old artilleryman, accustomed to judge ranges, estimated at about 20,000 yards. With a battery placed on the slight elevation on which "Mariero" had been built by its former owner, a Government official who had died a few months before, he, the mathematician, could

command and defend an area of something like 30,000 square yards—so dominating was the villa's position.

And now all this was his wife's—as a mark of his love and gratitude.

"There you are, and welcome! And, as I told you, the fur-trimmed cloak from Augusta Lundin's is part of the present. But whatever you do don't thank me, or I'll blush. And now you're to go in and learn your lessons, boys!"

The mathematician's wife smiled. She sat with the photograph in her hand.

"I won't thank you," she said. "I'll only say one thing—I don't know anyone who'd have done this in the way you've done it."

The mathematician twirled his moustache with a smile of satisfaction.

"You know, last Sunday, when I said I was going out to see some land belonging to the town, I wasn't speaking the truth. I was at 'Mariero.' I decided the matter then, although I didn't want to say anything till the contract was signed. There's no sense in unnecessary talk."

His wife shook her head gently and smiled again.

"It wasn't quite that I meant. I meant that no one else would buy a house for his wife without asking her if she thought she would be happy there. Though I know I shall be."

And now something happened which the mathematician had most insistently begged might not happen: he was compelled to blush. He blushed furiously; and it was not till some moments after that he said, with a shamefaced, helpless smile:

"Well, Maria, you know I've learnt as a soldier that surprise is the most important element in tactics."

But now his wife was laughing.

"Your tactics, yes! At first I used to admire them. Then

I submitted to them. At last I've grown so accustomed to them that I really believe I like them. The only thing that astonishes me is that there is still something in me which protests against them."

During the weeks that followed "Mariero" became Herr and Fru Lekholm's main interest.

There was planning and calculating of an evening when the day's work was over. The mathematician, who had hitherto regarded life with conspicuous mistrust and a severe freedom from illusion, blossomed out in these hours, like an evening primrose, into an optimist pure and undefiled. It was as though the barren northern soil in which he had hitherto been rooted had, through the signature of the contract, been transformed into the fertile earth of some southern land, producing the most wonderful harvests and the most marvellous fruits. His expectations from the two acres of new garden, which surrounded the villa with its towers and gargoyles, would have sufficed to provide the whole town, not only with such necessities as potatoes and beans, but also with asparagus, raspberries and gooseberries; while the mere presence of a stove in the hen-house caused him to dream of poultry-breeding and egg-laying on a gigantic scale.

His wife, brought up in a country vicarage, simply laughed at him.

"If you had an idea how like your father you are at bottom!"

Then she took the pencil from his hand, drew a thick line through all his fantastic calculations and made her own estimate, based on experience and hard facts. The mathematician replied by purchasing and studying a handbook on poultry-keeping entitled *Our Fowls and Their Output*—a small volume with numerous illustrations in which he found powerful and much-needed support for his op-

timism. But his wife remained immovable. To all his arguments she offered the same objection:

"There's nothing so tough as an old dead hen and nothing so delicate as a live chicken."

Against this dialectical fortress the mathematician was obliged to bring up his heaviest artillery; he dragged the stove up to the attack.

"You seem to forget," he said, "that there's a proper stove in the hen-house."

Early in May the mathematician's wife went to "Mariero" to get the garden into order and furnish the rooms provisionally. It would still be many years before the house was properly occupied and inhabited in both summer and winter. That would not happen till the mathematician retired from the finance committee at the age of sixty-five. Till then they would only spend the summer there. And as time passed they would complete its furnishing step by step, room after room, as their means allowed, until, on the mathematician's sixty-fifth birthday, it would be complete from cellar to tower—dining-room, drawing-room, study, the master's room, the mistress's room, rooms for each of the sons, and spare room, with gates open wide to welcome relations, friends, and possible daughters-in-law and grandchildren. And at "Mariero," every year after that, the same possible daughters-in-law and grandchildren would spend the summer and Christmas, gentle, affectionate daughters-in-law and robust, rampageous children, admired and spoilt by their soft-hearted grandfather.

The mathematician had worked it all out in advance, even his own transformation into a soft-hearted grandfather.

The reports his wife sent home after the first few days had temporarily, and in some degree, a cooling effect on his enthusiasm. It appeared that the rain came in; probably

the whole roof would have to be covered with fresh felt. In the vicar's opinion, too, a new well would have to be sunk sooner or later; the water in the present one had never been good. And what was worse, it seemed that they would have to sink the shaft very deep, perhaps even blast away the rock, which here was covered only by a fairly shallow layer of soil. As for the garden, considerable quantities of manure were required; and even then, also according to the vicar, no output of any magnitude could be expected. On account of the slope and the thin layer of earth, with the rock just underneath, the soil could not benefit from the rain to the degree which was necessary if the garden was to be a success.

The mathematician himself went over for a Sunday and convinced himself of the truth of this information, and the probable correctness of these suppositions. The result of his personal inspection would probably have convinced anyone who knew more about such matters that he had made a bad bargain. But in the first place he consoled himself with the thought that neither he nor his family, in all human probability, would be compelled to live on the produce of the garden; in the second, the mere sight of the handsome, imposing building and the sextuple view in the direction of the Småland border, combined with the feeling of ownership, filled him with a primitive joy so powerful that all disagreeable facts and depressing prophecies were put to flight.

In the evening he took the train back to the town, full of the old Lekholm enthusiasm. At the station he chucked his wife under the chin, spoke words of consolation to her, and promised to come next Sunday accompanied by the builder to attend to the roof and an expert in wells.

But the trip never came off.

At half-past ten the next Thursday morning he was sit-

ting in his office when a telephone message came from the vicar.

Fru Maria Lekholm had been found that morning lying dead at her bedside by the woman who came to help her in the house. A doctor had been sent for and declared that the cause of death was heart disease.

During the first twenty-four hours his sons thought he would go out of his mind. They had hardly time to think about their dead mother or pay any attention to her. They lived in continual terror lest something might happen to him they dared not speak of, but only as a vague and fleeting association of ideas—Uncle Anders's suicide, Aunt Charlotte's terrible fate . . . which of the two would it be?

The mathematician's sons, in their childhood, had already seen grief at close quarters more than once; but never before a grief like this, one moment terrifying, silent and brooding, the next as vehement and furious as if he wanted to crush the universe, shake the very pillars of life, like Samson, till they shook and fell, and he himself, and everyone and everything, were buried under the ruins.

He would have nothing to do with any of the practical details regarding his wife's burial. He would not even go over and fetch her dead body. He would not eat anything, would not go to bed, would not even take off his clothes and try to get a little rest.

Before the body was brought home to be placed in the coffin he barricaded himself into his room. Sometimes there were long periods of silence. And then—suddenly—there was a noise as of furniture being flung here and there, and he uttered a scream—a long hoarse scream like a furious wild beast's. They could hear him walking up and down with heavy steps, at times unsteady, as though he was staggering like a drunken man. Then there was quiet again for a time, and nothing was heard but his heavy breathing—

every breath a moan, as if he were being tortured with the most unbearable pain—till the moaning became less and died away. . . . And then, a quarter of an hour or half an hour later, there was a fresh outbreak. . . .

Karl Lekholm, now Dr. Holmes, who was the eldest son at home, had had to make preparations for the funeral as best he could. He telegraphed to Lars, who was now at Karlberg, Uncle Per, his clergymen uncles on his mother's side, his grandmother at Lund. They all came, one after the other.

Uncle Per came first. He had put aside all his work at once, managed to catch the day express, and was at the house of mourning the same evening. After a long delay he was admitted to his brother's room. But instead of having a calming effect, his presence seemed to make the mathematician's condition even worse than before. The sons, outside, could hear what took place in their father's room. Uncle Per was speaking to him in his low, earnest voice. Then came their father's cry, the cry of a man strained to breaking-point:

"God! you talk to me about God! It's a devil who's taken her from me! Only a devil could have done it. Don't speak of your God! Not a word about your Saviour! I can't hear their names! Be quiet! Have pity on me! I don't know what I'm doing! Leave me! I beg you! I want to be alone! Surely I can be master in my own house. Go away, I tell you!"

Uncle Per came out into the parlour again and paced up and down the floor with his hands behind his back.

Half an hour afterwards he knocked again at the door of the mathematician's room. But he was not admitted. The three boys and their uncle spent the whole night in the parlour, listening in terror to what was passing in their father's room.

The eldest of the three boys suggested that they should send for a doctor. But Uncle Per only shook his head.

"No doctor can help. Nothing can help but faith in God the Father in heaven and His only begotten Son, who gave His life for mankind."

When the coffin arrived next morning and was placed in the bedroom, the mathematician came out of his room, went into the room where his dead wife was and asked to be left alone again. He seemed quieter now. He shook hands with each of them—Uncle Per, Lars (who had arrived shortly before by the morning train), and the three other sons—a polite, absent, hurried, cool greeting, as if he were meeting them for the first time in his life.

"Now I want to be alone with mother for a bit," he said, and locked the bedroom door.

They heard him moving about in the room. It sounded as if he were carrying heavy things, hunting in drawers, moving the furniture. . . . In three hours he came back again. He had prepared the coffin for his dead wife, combed her hair and put the grave-clothes on her, and adorned her with the few and simple trinkets he had given her during their long married life—the gold watch with the long gold chain, the two gold bracelets, the blood-red garnet brooch. . . .

He himself said nothing of all this. He only said:

"It is my wish that no one shall on any account touch her or change anything in her coffin."

From that moment till the day after the funeral, when he resumed his work as treasurer, he did not utter a word but "yes," "no," and "do as you like."

To all appearance he had become colder, harder, more silent and reserved than ever before.

Only his sons, during the years that followed, could note the profound change that had taken place in him. He seemed to have become utterly indifferent to them—their conduct,

their reports, their success, their future. He could not, indeed, free himself from his old habit of asking them at dinner every day, before they sat down to table, if they had known their lessons. But they knew that the answer no longer interested him.

What filled his mind, what was the mainspring of his silent, hermit's life, he never told them; they had to guess. For that matter, they saw very little of him. He went to his office at a quarter to nine. At four o'clock he came home to dinner by way of the churchyard, where he spent a quarter of an hour daily at his wife's grave on his way to and from his work, standing by the grave hat in hand. At a quarter to six he returned to the town hall and often stayed there till ten o'clock.

It was as though he hated his home, feared the emptiness of it, and felt that nothing but work could give him the oblivion he longed for.

As for "Mariero," the proud, pinnacled villa in the commanding position, where his wife and he were to have grown old among gentle daughters-in-law and noisy rampageous grandchildren, he never saw it again. A few weeks after his wife's funeral he put it up for sale and sold it for what it would fetch.

BOOK THREE

I

He himself, Dr. Holmes, alias Karl Lekholm, had been the instrument of the next blow life had dealt his father.

How had it affected him? how had he sought to defend himself? or had it, perhaps, been the *coupe de grâce*?

He did not know.

We know roughly how large a quantity of poison the human organism can endure. We know with how small a fraction of a lung it can live. We know how much of its skin and flesh it can lose through an accident and still be kept alive. And we know a great many other things about the limits within which it can support life.

But we do not know at all, we have not the faintest idea, how a man can endure blows directed against his life's belief and his life's work. No idea! not the faintest idea!

Dr. Holmes walked up and down in his hotel room, up and down. . . .

Now he was at the goal. Within twenty-four hours he would stand before his father and say "Here I am!" How should he explain himself, his crime, his silence? No evasion, no postponement was any longer possible. The cowardice which had once made Uncle Anders prefer death to meeting his two brothers, that same cowardice had driven him, for all these years, to seek protection behind the impenetrable armour of silence. But now he must put it off, stand naked before his father and say: "I have not been a good son to you. I have hurt you as badly as a son can hurt a father. I may have killed all the faith and hope in life you had left, since your wife's death swept like an avalanche through the house you had built up with so much toil and care. When I forged your name I struck a

blow in the face of all you held most sacred in life—your lifelong labour for your children's success and prosperity, your impeccable sense of justice, your upright manliness. The sacrifice of all your manhood, the sun of your days and the star of your nights, I snuffed out as carelessly as one blows out a match. And here I am!"

And what answer would he receive?

He saw his father before him; the hard, cold gaze, the thin, disdainful lips, that face in which every muscle could quiver with wrath, bitterness and contempt. He heard his dry, curt voice: "You've lied!" He saw his hands gripping the riding-whip with the convulsive fanaticism with which the Puritans drove devils out of the possessed.

Dr. Holmes walked up and down—except for his dress, a faithful copy of his father at forty; tall, slender, sinewy, with his father's long, thin, rather curved nose, his cold, steel-grey eyes, his high, narrow forehead, strongly pointed chin and thin lips. And he was afraid—mortally afraid. It was as though twenty-five years had been wiped like chalk scrawls from the blackboard of his life. He had shrunk once more into the frightened boy of old days, when the voice of doom rang out from his father's study: "Come here, I want to speak to you!"

"Yes, father . . . here I am . . . after twenty years."

It would not be the riding-whip this time, as so often before. He would not have to stand still under a hail of blows, as in his boyhood. He would be met by something else, something even worse: contempt, anger, sorrow. . . . The curt voice would say: "I despise you, I don't know you"; the cold look would indicate the door; and a voice would whisper to him, "See what you have done with your father, see how you have bent him, how deeply you have furrowed his face. Don't you see that what you have done has hit him ten times as hard as your mother's death? Then it was fate dealt the blow—fate, which no man can master.

But next time it was *you!* The second and hardest blow was delivered by *you!* Can you meet the man whose old age you have emptied and desolated as death itself could not have done?"

No, he could not—not yet. He was not ready yet, he had not the courage. Not yet.

He crept back into his armour of cowardice. Even now, to the very last moment, he tried to gain time. He wanted to go the longest way round, like a dog which has hunted forbidden game and been called back to its master. He must make inquiries first, as he had done times without number in his childhood when inevitable punishment had awaited him. He well remembered the swift, frightened question addressed to one of his brothers: "Is he *very* angry?"

He even called his medical knowledge to his aid. It was not only he himself who was concerned, not merely the appalling mental strain he himself had to undergo at this meeting, in the first few moments in which they two would stand face to face—the bowed, shattered father and the son who had bowed and shattered him. He must think of the old man too. He had already reached the age when violent emotion might have the most serious consequences. He must arrange somehow that the old man was warned in advance. He must get into touch with one of his brothers, and take counsel as to the best course of action in order to spare the old man the first and most severe trial. . . .

His brothers—how should he get hold of them? What had become of them? He had no idea!

Lars! He was probably the easiest to get into touch with. He ought to be able to find him in the Army List or the State Almanack. Presumably they had the State Almanack at the hotel. He telephoned to the porter at once and asked him to send it up at once. He opened the book with nervous fingers. . . . G . . . I . . . M . . . L . . . La . . . Le . . . Lekholm, P. P., lieutenant, page— He stared in

front of him . . . Lekholm, P. P.—that was not Lars. Was it—was it his cousin Paul? He turned up the page indicated. Småland Artillery Regiment . . . lieutenants . . . Lekholm, Peter Paul, born 1898. Uncle Per's son a lieutenant—an officer! Punch, cards, women, money troubles! The son of Waldenström's disciple! He remembered him as a pale, pampered little boy of eight or nine; and now, twenty years later, he was a lieutenant. The man of God's only son! How had *that* happened? What was the explanation? The hunger which in the father had eaten its way inwards—had it now in his son, with the savage appetite accumulated during a generation, flung itself on the simplest dishes life provided—punch, cards and women? What did Uncle Per think of this leap into folly? No idea!

And Lars—where was he? What had become of him? Lars had always been a good son, who, as far as Dr. Holmes could remember, had not told a lie more than once in his life, and had suffered such torments of conscience afterwards that he had been sick. That was the time when he had been sent out on an errand and had bought a clay pipe and a twist of tobacco with the krona entrusted to him instead of using it as he had been told to do. Immediately after the crime he had been seized with panic, had gone out of the town and buried the twist of tobacco and the pipe, and then come home and said that he had “lost” the money. He had confessed his crime to Dr. Holmes in the evening, after they had gone to bed, and said that he *must* tell his father. Dr. Holmes had had the greatest difficulty in convincing him that this was an unnecessary and painful procedure, and Lars had refrained from confessing. But he had been sick instead.

Where had he gone? How had life treated him, and he life? Safe, sure, quiet Lars, who throughout his child-

hood and school-days had seemed to be the product of a union between diligence and sense of duty, who when still in the upper sixth had sworn eternal loyalty to Gurli Svensson—he had formerly confided the secret to Dr. Holmes one evening, emphasizing the immense importance of the step he had taken—and married her two years after he had left Karlberg on a sub-lieutenant's scanty pay and the thousand kronor a year his father had promised to allow them. Lars, who right down in the lower sixth had sworn a solemn oath some day to avenge the wrong life had done their father by one day commanding the regiment himself! Why had he left the Army? Had the trials of his *milieu* been too strong for him? Had he been swallowed up in the jungle of pleasure and disappeared?

No idea!

And the two others—Sven and Tage? He knew still less of them and their chances in life. They were younger than himself, Sven three years, Tage five years. And as younger brothers they had been treated as *quantités négligeables*, except when they had called attention to their existence in an irritating manner and been duly castigated.

What had become of them? Where should he look for them? At any rate they were not officials, as their father had dreamed and hoped. He had always pointed out how secure State employment was in compensation for the low pay. And now not one of his sons was in the stout register of Government officials.

When Dr. Holmes left the country Sven had already been for two years at the Technical High School. He was to become an engineer.

Sven had come into painful contact with the riding-whip more often than his brothers. As a boy he seemed to lack all capacity or wish to concentrate his mind on his work. And as the mathematician was firmly convinced that this in-

capacity was not due to any lack of theoretical ability, he did all that was in his power to overcome Sven's dislike of his studies by means of the riding-whip.

It gradually became clear that his idleness at his lessons was due to his unusual gift for mechanics. When only ten or twelve years old he was an expert watch-repairer. Unlike most other boys, he could not only take a watch to pieces, but also put it together again; he could even make it go. When still in the second class, his reputation as a watch-maker was so firmly established in the school, where there were plenty of rotten old silver and brass timepieces, that he came home nearly every afternoon with a shabby watch in his trousers pocket. And his interest in the watch made him neglect his lessons. Directly after dinner he sat down at a writing-table, placed an open school-book ostentatiously in front of him, pulled out the drawer in which the watch and a few tools were kept, and began his work. He must, when so engaged, have suffered from considerable nervous strain. He had at the same time to keep his eyes on the task in hand and his ears on the alert for the very least suspicious sound from the next room; for at any moment the mathematician might appear in the doorway, and then the drawer containing the watch and tools had to be thrust in again without fail.

For his elder brothers he was a generous source of annoyance and torment. The duty of keeping him on the narrow, stony path of virtue and diligence rested, according to a general order issued by their father, on their shoulders. This responsible task was the cause of continual friction, not only between them and the young mechanician, but between duty and curiosity in their own breasts. For it was undeniably interesting to see him take a watch to pieces and repair it. The result was usually a compromise; they let him alone, and then, at the last moment, helped him with his translations and did his sums for him. Nevertheless, at

the end of the spring term they, as well as he, were blamed for his bad reports and his failure to secure removes.

At last the mathematician put his threat into execution. When Sven, despite his promise to do better, failed to get his remove from the fifth class, he was taken away from school and apprenticed to a watchmaker. It soon appeared, however, that his craft did not satisfy the demands of his intellect. In a year's time he begged to be allowed to go back to school. His prayer was granted, though on very hard terms. And now his laziness had disappeared; he rose from class to class and obtained better and better reports in mathematics.

What had become of him? . . . Every time in recent years that Dr. Holmes had read of an epoch-making invention, he had wondered what had become of Sven, and if he too would astonish the world some day. He deserved to, if only for all the thrashings he had received in his boyhood. But Dr. Holmes had never seen his name in the papers, although in the past few years not a few Swedes had obtained world-wide publicity for achievements in Sven's line. But not he. What had become of him? Where was he now?

And Tage?

He had just got his remove into the fifth class when Dr. Holmes left the country. A little chap with extraordinarily fair hair and even more extraordinarily thin legs in his wide winter boots. . . .

As a little boy he had always said that he would be a bishop. His greatest pleasure had been to put on one of his mother's black silk aprons like a gown, climb up on a chair and repeat "Our Father" again and again.

One afternoon his passion for expounding Holy Writ had all but cost him his life. He had got up on the window-sill wearing the silk apron and opened the window to preach to the public in the street below. He had suddenly over-

balanced and fallen to the pavement from the second floor. Luckily the apron had caught in master-painter Blomberg's "gossip mirror" a floor below, which broke the violence of the fall. He had been carried up in a fainting condition to his mother, who was busy in the kitchen and had no idea that anything was wrong. He had a big bruise on his forehead, just over his right eye; that was all. And three days later he was standing on a chair again, preaching.

But what Dr. Holmes best remembered in him was his monstrous vanity, which often brought him into conflict with justice. His love of smart clothes had impelled him to the device of tearing buttons off his everyday suit on Monday mornings or making holes in it, so that he might be allowed to wear his Sunday finery one day longer. During his first year in the dancing class he had fastened cotton-wool round his calves in order to make his skinny legs look more handsome, manly and muscular. But he had been found out one day, when during a *shottische* the cotton-wool had slipped down to his ankles, and it had taken him years to live it down.

He was, too, the only one of the four brothers who had shown any feeling for or interest in music. But then he had escaped Aunt Charlotte's instruction and the sharp-edged ruler with which she beat time on her pupils' knuckles.

What had become of him? As a child he had had just those qualities which the study of his admired Galton made his father fear most—the combination of the Lekholms' vanity and the Töpfers' musical gift. But no doubt the mathematician in the course of years had come to see that the genius Galton had not discovered the convenient and infallible solution to life's great collection of sums that he fancied he had found. Another man, whose name was Mendel, had taken his place.

Had he abandoned Galton for Mendel? And had Men-

del been able to afford him any consolation in his misfortunes?

In a few hours he would find this out, this and a great deal else. And he was afraid—mortally afraid.

II

At one o'clock the telephone bell rang. It was a travelling companion he had agreed to lunch with, a silver-haired, rosy-cheeked old judge of the Supreme Court of the State of Oregon. His father had been Swedish, and now, in the evening of his life, he wanted to come home to the land of his forefathers to see how they had lived and find out something about his pedigree. He had not been able to make the journey before. It was not that he had lacked time or opportunity. He had been in Europe three times before. But he had never been able to get his wife to travel up to Sweden with him. Not for one single holiday during their thirty-eight years of married life had he left her side, the dear old soul. And she had not wanted to come to Sweden. That had, indeed, been the only subject on which they had ever differed in their long life together. She had argued thus: one utilizes a trip to Europe in looking at museums and art treasures in Paris, Italy and Athens, and possibly in visiting Jesus' tomb, but not in travelling to the North Pole.

But now she was dead, dear old soul. And now he had come. His pedigree was to be found in the books in a church in the Härjedal. "Beautiful country, I'm told." He had heard his father say, and was himself convinced, that his ancestors had occupied a very prominent position in that part of Sweden. "Very prominent and most remarkable people, I'm told." He would celebrate Christmas in the

church his forefathers had attended. He had always heard his father speak of the Christmas festival as the most wonderful memory of his childhood: snow, torches, sledges. And now he himself was on his way to see it.

He had repeatedly confided to Dr. Holmes and, for that matter, all the first-class passengers the object of his journey at this season. He had, indeed, talked so much about "the Swedish Christmas" in the saloon, library, bar and drawing-room that on the third or fourth day out he had been nicknamed "Father Christmas."

The old judge was waiting for him at a big round table in the middle of the dining-room. It was full of people—late travelling companions of his and other visitors in the hotel. The judge greeted him with a slice of cold veal on his fork and a smile which spread like a rosy shimmer from his snow-white teeth over his round baby cheeks.

He had been on his legs the whole morning; he had paid a visit to the American consul and through him got hold of a map of Gothenburg as it had been in the days when his father had emigrated thence to America. With the help of this map he had spent a few hours walking along roads his dear old father had once trodden on his journey into the unknown. "Most remarkable feeling, I tell you, doctor!" He was not ashamed to say that he had had to take out his handkerchief several times. His father had little dreamed then that one of his sons—

No, he would not boast about himself and his success. For if his father had not been the wonderful man he had been, he himself would not have reached the position he held in the State of Oregon. And it was a most strange feeling to be treading the soil of the land of his fathers. And just as strange was the thought that one must of necessity seek one's way back to one's place of origin, to one's roots in the earth. His children and his old friends had declared that it was madness for a man of his age to travel to Sweden

in midwinter. But his mind would never have been at peace if he had not seen a Swedish Christmas before he closed his eyes for ever. Two journeys were the outstanding features of his life—his wedding journey from Portland, Oregon, to New York, and now this. "A most remarkable, wonderful feeling!"

The old man chattered ceaselessly throughout lunch. The warmth of the room had heated his cheeks, as round and pink as a child's, till they looked as if they had been smeared with strawberry juice, and the keen, shrewd grey eyes glistened in anticipation of the marvels of a Swedish Christmas in the little church where his forefathers had worshipped.

Dr. Holmes suddenly felt physically unwell. He had not eaten a scrap the whole morning, and yet he could not swallow any food.

Perhaps it was that the talkative old man opposite him was a judge. He did not know. But suddenly the thought occurred to him: Was forgery one of the crimes in respect of which a charge lapsed after a certain number of years, or was it not? Was he still in danger of being stopped, arrested and sentenced to penal servitude? Suppose someone here in the restaurant recognized him? He had not thought of that before.

His fear became panic. He pushed his plate away and looked swiftly round. Suppose someone who knew him was sitting at a table close by—some fellow-student from his Lund days. . . . He did not know himself how much his appearance had changed since those days; one always thinks that an inward change must be reflected in one's outward appearance. Perhaps it was not so. . . .

The judge had got a large, thick, black cigar, a Corona Corona, and was sucking at it as if it was a stick of caramel.

"What's wrong with you, doctor? You look so pale. Do you feel the motion of the ship now that you're ashore? I

know that feeling—most remarkable feeling. Take a brandy with your coffee. I mean to myself.”

Dr. Holmes made an excuse, rose and rushed up to his room. A perspiration broke out on his forehead. He flung himself on his bed in the alcove, thrust the pillows out of the way and stretched himself at full length, with his eyes shut and his hands folded over his breast. His brain was in a fever. The pain that tormented him seemed to him unbearable, even for a few short minutes. He sprang up again and staggered about the room, not knowing where he was going. . . .

He thought of Uncle Anders. He understood him now, understood him with every nerve in his body—his anguish, his fear, his cowardice at the moment when he seized the razor. It was, perhaps, in such a state of panic that most people took their lives. Their desperate acts had, perhaps, in most cases no connection with any feeling that their lives were ruined or misspent. It was the next minutes, hours or days that they could not endure—the anguish, the hell fire which they *must* go through before they came out on the other side where forgiveness and reconciliation awaited them. He understood Uncle Anders; he understood all these people now.

He had had to deal with several would-be suicides; several times he had saved their lives. And each time he had thought: Why am I mending this wreck of humanity to lead a long life of misery? But he saw the problem in a different light now. The mental agony, the hellish torture which he himself went through, as he tottered up and down the little hotel room among unopened trunks and suitcases, had thrown a sudden, blinding light over the whole mental state in which a man commits suicide. It was the coming minutes or hours from which suicides wanted to save themselves, not life. It was those hours in which the pressure from within is so appalling that it shatters the in-

telligence, when the thoughts swarm one upon another like ants in a demolished ant-heap; it was those hours that could make a man commit suicide, and not the long darkness which awaited him when he had got through those hours. A man could grow accustomed to long years of darkness. There was a saying, "Life is a matter of habit"; and this applied even to a gloomy, unhappy life.

If it were otherwise, why did not all these would-be suicides more often repeat their attempts? It was not their lives they wanted to destroy. They only wanted to take a leap forward in time, to jump over the abyss and find rest and balm for their tortured souls on the other side. And this leap, this flight from a few anguished moments, became what it really was never intended to be—a leap into eternity. . . . That was time's own revenge for its misuse by men; it allowed no such leaps. . . .

He opened one of his suitcases and hunted for some veronal tablets. He knew they were finished already. He had slept badly on board. And when he had taken the last powder he had said to himself: "Now I *must* go through with it!" He had not even that way out any longer—a few hours' artificial oblivion. He *must* act. . . .

In a little while he went down to the porter to try and get hold of his cousin. His cousin ought to find it easier than Uncle Per to understand and excuse an absconding forger. . . . Paul was probably on the telephone. In any case there was no doubt a regimental officers' mess where they could give information about him.

He told the porter what he wanted—to get into touch as quickly as possible with a Lieutenant Lekholm in the Småland Artillery.

The porter stood turning over the leaves of the telephone book, giving Dr. Holmes a swift glance from time to time as he did so. Then he said:

"Excuse me, sir, do you speak Swedish?"

Dr. Holmes went scarlet. Was he discovered already?

"Yes," he said in a low voice, and looked at his hands. The porter smiled.

"I beg your pardon," he said, "but I ask you because Engineer Lekholm came out a little while ago and asked if a Herr Lekholm had come by the boat from America; and from the description he gave, I understand that it must have been you he meant."

Dr. Holmes stared at him.

"Engineer Lekholm?"

"Yes, Engineer Sven Lekholm."

"Does he live here?"

"No, he lives at Falkenberg. But he's often in town on business, and he stays here. He's sure to be up in his room now; the key isn't here. I'll ask."

"No, no, I'll go up myself. What number is it?"

"211."

"Thanks."

III

Dr. Holmes went slowly upstairs. His heart thumped; his legs could hardly support him. He had to take a tight grip of the banisters and drag himself up step by step. He stood for a long time outside 211 before he knocked. But he no longer felt any fear. He was only tired, pumped out as after a long and perilous march. And he felt something of the same relief and indifference which a criminal is said to feel when at last he surrenders to the authorities: Here I am! Here you have me!

He knocked and knocked again, the second time harder. And as he received no answer, he turned the handle, opened the door and entered a small lobby. He stood for a moment or two in the darkness and knocked for a third time,

on the inner door. He heard a voice within answer, but his heart was beating so hard that he could not understand the words. And then he opened.

With his back to him at the washing-basin in the dark alcove stood a man in his shirt and drawers, occupied with his toilet. He caught up his trousers and disappeared behind the curtain which separated the alcove from the rest of the room.

"The devil!" he cried, "why can't one be left in peace? I told you to wait! Is it the porter? What do you want?"

Dr. Holmes had shut the door behind him and remained standing with his back to the wall. Suddenly a smile flashed over his face: in that fraction of a minute in which he had caught a glimpse of his brother he had been carried back thirty years to their boyhood.

"Who is it?" the curt voice asked again. "What do you want?"

"It's I," Dr. Holmes answered quietly in an almost choking voice, "your brother Karl."

He was answered by a low, satisfied, neighing laugh, a laugh like an audible smile.

"I said so! So I was right when I said it was you I saw going out of the restaurant! Who was that fellow you were sitting with?"

"An American lawyer. A judge."

"You'd better take care of yourself. I shouldn't like to do business with him."

Dr. Holmes sat down on the sofa, with his elbows on his knees and his head in his hands. This meeting was so unlike everything he had imagined all these years, so absurdly commonplace.

"Why wouldn't you like to do business with him?" he asked, just for the sake of saying something.

"Him? He's as hard as stone under his pink tooth-paste smile. I'm a bit of a student of faces, a Sherlock Holmes.

That fellow's cordiality itself when it doesn't cost him anything. But if there was anything at stake, he could not only murder a man, but kick away the corpse."

Dr. Holmes shrugged his shoulders impatiently. This was the same Sven he had parted from twenty years ago—just as cocksure, sententious, positive.

"You're mistaken," he said.

Sven poured water into the basin.

"I mistaken! Seldom, old chap! Seldom! Perhaps I was mistaken, too, when I went out to the porter a little while ago and asked if there was another Lekholm in the hotel, a Lekholm who had arrived by the boat from America this morning?"

"How could you be so sure of that?"

"I'll tell you, old chap! The whole secret is this, that there are so few possibilities in this life. It doesn't need any sixth sense to see into the future a bit. I knew you were still alive."

"How could you know that?"

"Because if you weren't, we should have found out that you were dead."

"I might have lived under another name out there—as a matter of fact I did."

Sven laughed.

"Ha, ha! Even if you lived under an assumed name, you must have had a document giving your real name somewhere among your things."

"Yes, I had."

"There, you see. In the second place, I knew you were getting on well."

"How could you know that?"

"Well, for one thing, the old dad said a few years ago that you had sent him a lot of money, University debts. For another, it's nine chances out of ten that before anyone drowns he cries for help. And you hadn't done that.

You hadn't written home and asked for money once."

"I might have gone under in silence."

"Very few people indeed do that. Anyhow, I was sure you would come home just now, for the old dad's seventieth birthday. Nine people out of ten want to see their old father, or mother, before they die. And when I was sitting at lunch in the restaurant and saw all the Swedish Americans who had come home by the boat for Christmas I thought at once: 'I wouldn't be surprised if Karl was sitting in this room.' And I looked round to try and find you. But you were sitting with your back to me. It wasn't till you got up and went out that I was prepared to swear it was you. I was on the verge of calling after you. But instead I went out to the porter and said, 'Look here, porter, that gentleman who went out of the dining-room just now is called Lekholm. Where did he go?' But of course that damned idiot of a porter said, 'No, there's no other Lekholm in the hotel but you.' So I thought, all right, I *may* have been mistaken. And so I went up to my room. I'll be ready in a minute. There's no particular difficulty about lifting the veil of the future a little, as the novelists say. It's only a question of using one's intelligence. There aren't such a damned lot of possibilities in life as people imagine."

Dr. Holmes looked at his hands.

"Does father expect me too?"

"Of course he does. Anyhow he's been sure you'd come home before he died. You're a Lekholm. Uncle Fredrik came home."

Dr. Holmes interrupted him. "Tell me, Sven, before we talk about the others—what do you think father will say to me?"

"*What should he say?* He'll be glad, of course. Why shouldn't he be?"

"How is he?"

"*How is he?* First-rate! He got a boil on his neck three

years ago. That's the only thing he's ever had wrong with him as long as I can remember."

"But how is he, generally speaking? How's he getting on?"

"*How's he getting on?* How could he get on in more than one way? What in Heaven's name do you mean? Are you another of those fellows who think there are so many possibilities in life? You seem to think that, because you've been away twenty years, the whole world here at home must be completely changed. No, old chap, life isn't as complicated as that. It's a pretty simple affair at bottom. Believe me, I'm right. The old dad's still treasurer, still goes to mother's grave and takes his hat off every morning, and sets the mathematical matriculation papers every spring and autumn. He's just like what he was twenty or thirty years ago. The only difference is that his hair's got a little shorter—not thinner, but shorter. And his teeth too—they're as strong as they were; but they've got worn down."

"But isn't he broken? . . . Isn't he?"

"Broken? Who could have broken him, if I may ask?"

"I mean, when I left the country . . . When I went off——"

"Why should you have broken him? The only difference since you went is that he's become easier to deal with. He's quite spoilt Tage. He's been allowed to do what he likes. But otherwise he's just the same. And so's old grandpapa."

Dr. Holmes looked up at the curtain behind which Sven was still occupied with his toilet.

"Grandpapa? You don't mean to say he's still alive!"

Sven laughed.

"Yes, he is! It's his hundredth birthday the day after to-morrow. Didn't you know that?"

"Yes, of course, I remember that he was born the day after to-morrow a hundred years ago, now that you mention it. But how could I imagine——?"

"That he was alive? Why not? There are only two alternatives. Either one's alive or one's dead. And he's alive. He's in bed most of the time nowadays. But otherwise he's as lively as a grig. Just as aggressive as he must have been in old times. Ten years ago he actually put Uncle Per in the corner. Took him by the collar and put him in the corner. He didn't get his Sunday dinner at half-past one sharp. Uncle Per hadn't come home in time from the mission house. The sermon had been too long. And the old man flew into a rage. He declared that God in His all-wisdom had decreed that a real Christian service should end punctually at one, so that people could get home in time and eat their dinner at half-past one. And so he put his eldest son in the corner. Well, I'm ready now."

The curtain was pushed aside and Sven Lekholm emerged. Dr. Holmes rose and looked at his brother. Why, it was grandpapa—grandpapa without a moustache—grandpapa as he remembered him from a faded photograph on the table that stood by the sofa at home: the hook nose, the incorrigible lock of hair on the forehead, the slight nervous frame. Sven gave his brother a curt nod by way of greeting and said: "Wait a minute, I just want to speak to the porter!"

He went to the telephone.

"Can I speak to the porter? Thank you. Yes, it's Engineer Lekholm. Well, *wasn't* there any other Lekholm in the restaurant but me? . . . What do you say? . . . You didn't *know*? . . . What do you say? . . . You *couldn't* know. . . . But I told you he *was* there. What do you say? . . . Of course not! All I wanted to say was that one oughtn't to be too cocksure. What do you say? . . . No, that was all I wanted to say. Thank you!"

He put the telephone receiver down with a thump and went up to his brother.

"Welcome, old chap! We won't be sentimental and

ceremonial. We'll just give each other three thumps on the back. Wel-come—home! The devil, how like father you are!"

"And you're like grandpapa!"

Sven drew himself up:

"I like grandpapa? What do you mean? I'm not like any of the family. I'm like myself and no one else. What do you do out there?"

"I'm a naval doctor."

"Excellent, you can give me something for my little troubles. Who's got time to go to a doctor? Something with real American push in it. Were you in the war too?"

"Yes, a bit."

Sven began to pace nervously up and down the room.

"Yes, that war—it was the devil of a business. Uncle Per became a millionaire over it."

"A millionaire?"

"Yes, indeed! He's a regular Midas. He can't touch anything without its turning into money. That's *his* curse. You can understand how unhappy he must be; fancy wanting all the time to follow one's Saviour and finding gold sticking to one's fingers every time one folds them in prayer. Tragic!"

He smiled to himself—the bitter, superior smile of the far-sighted man with no illusions, the lifelong solitary, the self-centred theorist. His light blue, colourless eyes had the same absent, fanatical stare. Dr. Holmes contemplated him as he walked up and down with short steps, nervously fingering the small change and keys in his trousers pockets. He seemed suddenly to see Sven's destiny before him—the unsuccessful inventor's. He was filled with compassion. But at the same time the feeling he had had towards Sven in his childhood and youth rose again in him—impatience with a man who had only himself, his imaginary superiority, his obstinacy, to blame for his failure.

Sven Lekholm stopped short in his promenade up and down the room.

"By the way, I've just thought of something. Can you tell me who wrote the words, 'The book of history is the bible of irony?'"

Dr. Holmes shook his head. Sven began to pace up and down again.

"I've seen that somewhere in an English book. It's the best general summing-up of life I've ever heard or read: 'The book of history is the bible of irony!' What do you say, old chap?"

Dr. Holmes shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"You were talking about Uncle Per just now. You were going to tell me about him."

Sven Lekholm rattled the keys and money in his pocket louder and more nervously than before.

"That's just what I am doing. It's Uncle Per I'm talking about. But you seem to have forgotten in these twenty years that I'm not a schoolboy, but nearly forty. If I talk about a thing I'll talk about it in the only way I can talk about it. I'm not at school any longer, and obliged to answer questions. I'm a grown-up man, damn it! But you seem to be just like Lars; you can't ever realize that I'm anything but a silly, troublesome little boy. Lars is always like that—as if he was hearing my lessons. I've my way; you've yours."

Dr. Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

"My dear Sven, we haven't met after twenty years only to come to loggerheads as we did when we were boys."

"Good, I'm glad you said that! Now, we can talk. But don't interrupt me. I've *my* own way, and it suits *me*! Well, then, I was going to tell you about Uncle Per. But first I must offer you a drink."

He went to the alcove in which the bed stood, began to rout in a suitcase, and came back with an unopened whisky

bottle, a little round box and a corkscrew. He put the bottle and corkscrew on the table. He opened the little round box, stepping forward to Dr. Holmes as he did so.

"Look at that!" he said, showing him a little collar stud. "What do you see that's curious about that?"

Dr. Holmes looked at the stud. It seemed to be a quite ordinary collar stud, such as one wears in the front of one's shirt, with an ivory foot and neck and a head of some yellow metal.

"Well, can you see anything curious about it?"

Dr. Holmes weighed it in his hand, tried to screw it, and attempted to open it, supposing that the little object concealed some mysterious, ingenious mechanism. But he could not discover anything curious about it. The stud was, and remained, in his eyes a quite ordinary collar stud.

Sven threw it up and caught it several times in his open hand, and smiled his superior, disillusioned smile, while his unseeing, light blue eyes stared out into space.

"This collar stud," he said in a moment or two, "has a most remarkable characteristic. It can't roll under the furniture."

He went to the chest of drawers, lifted his hand to a level with his head and dropped the stud on the floor. It stopped almost directly it had fallen. He stooped down to pick it up and carried out the experiment a dozen times, repeating every time:

"You see!"

Finally he went to the window and looked out into the rain.

"That stud's history," he said, "throws a good deal of light upon the human mentality, upon the incredible stupidity of the animal which zoologists call *homo sapiens*. Perhaps you know what is the most damnable thing in the world, next to lying down on the grass on a summer day to dream and doze, and being compelled to fight flies and gnats

instead. It's this: You're in a hurry. You've got to change at top speed. You've got to change your shirt. And as you're putting your collar stud into the shirt, it slips out of your fingers and rolls under the heaviest piece of furniture in the room, the chest of drawers or the wardrobe, right to the back, close to the wall. You throw yourself flat on the floor and try to reach it with your fingers. You can't reach it. You swear. You get up again, go out into the lobby and get a stick to push it out with. Now you can reach it, certainly. You curse. It may happen that you get it out at last, after great efforts and hellish cursing. But more often you can't get it. And then you have to play the part of furniture-remover and move the chest of drawers or wardrobe.

"And when you've got the infernal thing in your blood-thirsty hands again at last, you swear a sacred, solemn oath that the first thing you'll do next morning is to go into a haberdasher's and buy a spare stud. But you don't. You forget. The trouble's all over. It's rather embarrassing, too—in fact, it requires some courage—to go into a shop and buy only a collar stud. The charming shop assistant, or the gentleman who looks like a Foreign Office attaché, makes you feel awkward. You get annoyed when you're asked if you don't want something else as well—silk shirts, socks, pants, ties, collars. And so you put off buying that spare stud.

"Well, when I'd had a misadventure of this kind twice, I swore that I would invent a stud which could not possibly *roll* more than a few inches at most from the spot where it fell. I racked my brains over it. But one night, as I was lying awake, thinking of quite a different problem, a voice within me said: 'You silly fool, make the foot square, and then it can't roll!' I patented the stud. I was sure that I should make a fortune by it; and so was the dealer I got into touch with. But what do you think happened? A fiasco, old chap! Fiasco and loss! The dealer and I saw pretty soon

that people don't want any kind of studs but those which can roll under a chest of drawers. That's the only stud the human race wants, that and no other. One would think it would be more or less a matter of indifference to the said human race whether it used a collar stud with a square or a circular foot: and that, consequently, it might prefer to buy a stud with a square foot, if it proved to possess notable advantages.

"But it isn't so. The human race isn't like that. When the world war broke out, most people couldn't believe their ears. They couldn't understand that there could be people so mad as to want to murder and ruin each other. But do you know what I did, old chap? Why, I smiled. I knew how damnably stupid mankind is. The collar stud fiasco had taught me that. Now I'm presenting it to friends and relations; but there's not one of them uses it except the old dad. He thinks it most practical. But the others only laugh. As if there was anything so damned ridiculous and laughable in a person wearing a rational collar stud! As if one——"

Dr. Holmes's impatience had now reached such a pitch that he was no longer able to control himself. He interrupted Sven in the middle of a sentence.

"Look here, Sven," he said. "I've come home after being away twenty years. I've a thousand things to talk to you about. We can let the collar stud wait till later. It *oughtn't* to be so hard for you to understand that after all these years I'd like to hear something about my father and my brothers and my relations in general."

Sven rattled his keys.

"All in good time, all in good time. The reason I told you about the stud was that I meant to make you a present—in return for all the times you've swotted over English and German with me, old chap! It won't take long to tell you about the family. You seem to have the mistaken idea that the possibilities of life are inexhaustible. That's only so in

novels. Not in life! Believe me, I'm right! Life with a big L, as male and female bluestockings call it, is a pretty simple business. And its motto might very well be those words I once read, 'The book of history is the bible of irony.' That's as true as can be. Look at Uncle Per, for example. It was him we were talking about, by the way. You remember what he was like. I always call him Good Friday. You understand—from Robinson Crusoe, you remember! Friday, Robinson's black servant—Good Friday, Jesus Christ's white servant!"

Dr. Holmes could not help intervening. He had become a schoolboy again and felt he simply *must* call his younger brother to order.

"Of course it doesn't matter," he said, "but I'd just like to point out that it wasn't you, but Lars, who once said he always felt it was like Good Friday when Uncle Per came to stay."

Sven stopped short as if he had been checked by a mortal insult.

"Shut up! It was *I* who *called* him Good Friday—and that's that!"

Dr. Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

"Well, well, as you like. You've *your* way, as you said just now. Go on."

Sven went on walking up and down like an animal in a cage.

"Well, then, about Good Friday. You know what he was like. He despised the world and the flesh, including his own. But you remember, too, perhaps, that when Paul was born he bought that house in Storgatan. And what happened then? Why, he joined the local board of the bank; then he became a member of parliament—one of the Free Church group in the Second Chamber—chairman of the town council, and at last a director of the Provincial Bank. Everything he touched turned to money and yet more money—till at

last he became a millionaire. And it was I who helped him to become a millionaire!

"It happened like this. It was during the war. I was moving about in Sweden a good deal, just as I am now. And I had an idea. It wasn't a stroke of genius by any means. Ships! I must try and get hold of a few old tubs! They were worth money at that time. It didn't matter what the ships were like so long as they could float more or less. I had got hold of four—or, to be quite correct, I could get them cheap. But I had no ready money. And so I thought of Good Friday. I went to see him and expounded the text. He loathed the war, of course, and would naturally have showed me the door if I had dared even breathe that it was chiefly the money I was thinking of. But, you see, for Good Friday the war was a quite special war between the only German Protestant God on the one side and the Franco-Catholic rogues and Antichrists on the other. And I knew that if one could put it to him that it was every Protestant Christian's duty to do everything possible to help the Germans and their God, he'd join. And he did! And so I and another chap became ship-owners on the spot. And we made money—heaps of money!

"For over a year all went well with the company—unity and concord, peace and happiness. But one fine day I got a telegram from Good Friday. He must see me, he said. Well, I got into the train, came, saw and heard. He didn't want to remain in the company. His conviction of the inner meaning of the butchery of the war had not been shaken in any way, and he still considered that everything possible should and must be done to help the Germans as the representatives of Protestantism. It was not that aspect of the matter which made him wish to withdraw. But however righteous the cause might be, he did not feel that he could, to God and his own conscience, justify his conduct in risking other people's lives even for the most righteous cause in the world. He

meant the crews of the old tubs. I tried to explain to him that their lives were a matter for their own consciences and not his. They knew what they were about. They had entered the firm's service voluntarily, with their eyes open and without any sort of misrepresentation on the part of the firm. From one point of view it was certainly deplorable that there were men ready to risk their lives for filthy lucre. But this was perhaps comprehensible, if one looked a little deeper into the question. Perhaps they had families to keep; the captains and some of the officers had, at least. Perhaps, with the high pay they got, they could provide their children with a better education than they could otherwise have done. And those who had no wife or children possibly had an old mother or broken-down father to keep, to whom they might give a little more happiness in those days of bread-cards and no fats. Indeed, he fully agreed with me on that point, and had himself looked at the matter from the same angle.

"But his decision was unalterable. He had formed it in accordance with the demands of his conscience, and could not alter it. He wanted to be free. Well, it didn't matter to us—me and the other chap. It was only a question of buying him out. Money wasn't hard to get, and he received, by degrees, something like a million.

"Well, what do you think happened then? That was what I've been leading up to—and I think it's a good example of the truth of those words, 'The book of history is the bible of irony.' What do you think happened? Why, a few years later the other chap and I were left with a few old tubs on our hands, which no human being on earth would look at. They were the only assets we had. Moreover, not only had we lost every ore we possessed, but we were liable for unpaid taxes. But Good Friday, who felt, for the most lofty, noble reasons, that he could not take part in such a profitable business, has got money which he despises and which makes

him ill and unhappy, because it takes away too much of his time and strength from the one thing that really matters in this world—the saving of souls.”

Sven stopped in front of Dr. Holmes and stared at him, smiling his disillusioned smile.

“That’s what I mean when I say, ‘The book of history is the bible of irony.’”

He stood motionless for a long time. Even the nervous fingers in his trousers pockets had ceased to rattle money and keys as he stared with unseeing eyes into his brother’s face. Then the rattling in his trousers pockets began again, and he recommenced his promenade.

“Or take Uncle Fredrik!”

He sniggered once or twice.

“Poor devil! I’ve often thought of him. The whole of his life he wandered about and wore himself out in the search for gold. And then it turned out that he had oil worth several hundred thousand kronor just outside his front-door. Do you remember what he said before he went back: ‘I used to think only in terms of gold, but now I’m beginning to think in terms of oil’? And so he went off to look for oil. But he never found any. I’ve often thought of him. His brain is in its way typical of all mankind’s. One can’t see a problem as a whole. Take an invention as an example——”

He stopped by the writing-table and evidently caught sight of the whisky bottle, which still stood unopened.

“Good Lord, I forgot you were going to have a drink. You must need one, as you come from a prohibition country. We’ve an institution here called the Bratt system. Perhaps you know——”

Dr. Holmes interrupted him impatiently. “Yes, yes, I know it. I heard every detail of it on board the boat. You needn’t go into it now. Go on!”

Sven took up the corkscrew which he had laid on the table when he put down the whisky bottle.

"Here you see another of my admirable inventions! I don't suppose there's anything more damnable than a cork which breaks when one's trying to pull it out of the bottle. You're left with the corkscrew in your hands and the floor covered with fragments of cork. It was a rotten cork. You try again. The hole in the cork only gets bigger. You take out your pocket-knife to cut the damned thing out, and nine times out of ten you end by pushing the cork down into the bottle, and so the wine or whisky is spoilt. But here you've a real corkscrew. It can never break the cork, however old and rotten it is, because it isn't constructed like an ordinary corkscrew. It isn't really a corkscrew at all. It doesn't bore down into the cork, but grips it on two sides by means of two thin blades which one pushes down between the neck of the bottle and the cork. It's the only rational corkscrew. But do you think it sold? No! And why? For the simple reason that it doesn't correspond to people's idea of a corkscrew. The whole trouble is that——"

There was a ring at the telephone. He looked at his watch, and took plenty of time before putting the receiver to his ear.

"Thanks, I'm coming!"

He put back the receiver and continued:

"You see, the trouble is that because the implement with which one draws a cork out of a bottle is called a corkscrew in everyday talk people have got the idea that it must necessarily have a screw. And the screwless corkscrew may be the most rational in the world, it doesn't help. People *are* like that. They——"

Dr. Holmes's patience had reached breaking-point. How many hundreds of times, as a boy, he had tried to make him hurry so that he might get to school in time! There was

always something which detained him. And then he had been late and had it noted against him.

"I say, Sven, is someone waiting for you down there?"

"Yes, I'm going now! I've an appointment! In fact, it's the most important appointment I've ever had in my life. In a way. The car's come."

Dr. Holmes rose. He had turned fiery red in the face with suppressed wrath. He could no longer contain it. The fellow was and remained incorrigible. Just as casual and self-centred as in old days! No idea of punctuality! No consideration for others. Always some absurd trifle at the last moment, which interested him to the exclusion of everything else! He knew this appointment was one of the most important in his life. And yet he stood about preaching on the stupidity of mankind with an idiotic corkscrew as his text.

"Look here, Sven, I don't want any hard words to pass between us in the first half-hour of our meeting, when we haven't seen one another for twenty years. But I must say I think you're behaving rather casually in standing here and jawing about an old corkscrew. Be off with you! The car's waiting, you say."

Sven smiled his superior smile.

"The car won't come to any harm. It's a closed one! Besides, it's mine! In the third place, I know what I'm about! I'm not so stupid as you seem to imagine. But there's one thing I meant to ask you when you first came in. Did you meet a Mr. Thompson on the boat?"

"Yes, I did. He has something to do with cars."

"What sort of fellow is he?"

Dr. Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

"I don't know. I didn't study his mentality."

"It's him I'm to meet now. If things go well, you may come to have a different idea of me. It's about an article of universal value. But we won't talk unnecessarily, as the old

dad says. I'll ring you up later, and then we can arrange when we shall have dinner."

He went into the alcove by the bed, snatched up a brown leather portfolio, put on his overcoat and crammed his velvet hat on the back of his head.

"Have a whisky while I'm out! Exit Sven Lekholm! Now for it!"

Dr. Holmes stood still for some time, staring at the door which Sven had slammed after him. . . . Then he went to the window and looked down into the street. He caught a glimpse of a car driving away. It was a Nash saloon car which must have cost several thousand dollars. Perhaps Sven was well off despite everything? . . .

He turned round and cast a glance at the writing-table as he passed it. On it lay the collar stud which would not roll under a chest of drawers and the rational corkscrew. He took the corkscrew in his hand and looked at it. It had a handle like an ordinary corkscrew, but instead of a screw it had two thin steel plates, one slightly curved. To test the "only rational" corkscrew he took up the whisky bottle and tried to thrust the steel blades down between the neck of the bottle and the cork. But he could not make it work; and after several attempts he flung it down on the table.

He did not know what to think. . . . If the invention Sven was to show Mr. Thompson was no better than that, it had little chance of being placed upon the world market. . . .

And he suddenly burst out laughing as he had hundreds of times as a child and as a young man, when his anger had disappeared and he was able to take a tolerant view of Sven and his doings. When he tried to leave the room, a minute later, he could not get out. Sven had locked him in and taken the key with him. . . .

He had to telephone down to the porter and ask to be let out.

.

Dr. Holmes stayed in his room the whole afternoon; and as he thought, he could not help feeling, ever more strongly and more painfully, how little life gave. Twenty long years had passed; but for Sven they might have been so many weeks. His knowledge had increased, and perhaps his capacities too; and deep furrows had been ploughed in his forehead. He had, too, to judge from the little he had told Karl about himself, suffered the changes and chances of business life. He had been a millionaire for some time and become as poor as a rat again. But despite his knowledge, capacities and experience, he was still marking time on the same spot where Dr. Holmes had left him twenty years ago. It was as though the years had just flowed like running water through his continually occupied fingers. . . .

He himself had probably no idea how stationary his life had been, with all its nervous hurry, like a squirrel in a cage. If Dr. Holmes were unkind enough to point out how exasperatingly like he was to what he had been in old days, he would probably not even take it as an insult. He would only smile his superior smile and say, as he used to say in his boyhood, "Shut up!" Perhaps he would also point out how many things of different kinds he had done, how many inventions he had produced which had been more successful than the collar stud and the corkscrew. He would refer to the nervous energy with which he had worked all those years. In other words, he would not even understand what Dr. Holmes meant, blind as he was to characteristics of his own which everyone else could discover at a glance.

The thought of Sven gave him a disagreeable feeling. It was as though the meeting with him had made life seem grudging and miserable. Perhaps it was the same with himself as with Sven—and with most other people too. Individual development was nothing but an illusion created by mankind with regard to itself; hands moving on a clock face in the same everlasting circle to measure another de-

velopment of quite a different kind—time. Perhaps a man never really grew older than he was when he reached maturity, and all that followed, and was called individual development, was nothing but an illusion, which a deeper insight into his character and history would reveal as nothing but greater skill in utilizing the capacities his education had given him.

He went through every detail of the meeting again and again—Sven's fantastic talk, his manner of expressing himself, his gestures. . . .

There was *one* possibility which he now realized for the first time—the whole of Sven's behaviour might have been nothing more or less than camouflage. Perhaps the object of his ceaseless flow of words was to avoid a painful explanation, to escape a morbid discussion of his brother's crime, which had been committed twenty years before and which no amount of discussion could alter. Or perhaps he had simply desired to conceal his own embarrassment, his uncertainty in the situation created by their unexpected meeting. And so, in his haste, he had had recourse to the means which lay nearest at hand—jabber.

It was possible that this was the case, and that Sven was quite a different person from what he had shown himself to be in that awkward half-hour.

It was even possible that Sven was two quite different people, a gas-bag to the world but inwardly calm and concentrated, a man who tried to drown the noise around him with his own noise to protect himself and his, a man who was himself only in his work. And perhaps he was like that now, as he sat and conferred with Thompson about the article of universal value. . . .

But whatever the reason for his camouflage might be, Dr. Holmes had gained nothing by meeting him. He really knew just as little as before about his father and the rest of his family—just as little, indeed, about Sven himself.

About six o'clock Sven rang up Dr. Holmes. They could not meet for dinner; he had to dine with Thompson and "another chap" at a place called the Bachelors' Club. Afterwards there was to be another conference. But he hoped it would be over at eleven. He would ring up later. . . .

Dr. Holmes dined alone in the almost deserted hotel restaurant. The American boat's passengers had scattered in the course of the afternoon, and those who still remained occupied only a few tables. The old judge from Oregon had a companion with him, of whom Dr. Holmes, without any reason whatever, was ready to bet that he was the American consul. The other visitors were conspicuous by their absence.

After dinner he went down into the café. That, too, was practically deserted. The orchestra was playing to empty chairs and tables. The waiters leaned against the massive marble pillars like tired caryatids. The few guests who were there talked in whispers or in hushed tones.

Dr. Holmes did not understand it at first. What had become of the cheery, noisy Swedish café life, the round, ruddy faces illuminated by the glow of cigars, the atmosphere of punch and tobacco, the crashing bursts of laughter, the buxom waitresses? Was Sweden still in the ban of the economic crisis? Could people afford it no longer? He called a waiter to make inquiries, and was answered with a smile and a name:

"Bratt."

He fled from the desolate scene in half an hour and began to pace up and down his room again, waiting for Sven.

Hour after hour passed. At last, at twelve o'clock, he undressed, put on pyjamas and a dressing-gown, and went on walking up and down in slippers.

He could not sleep. His fears took possession of him afresh. What should he say to his father? How would he

find him? . . . He was convinced now that Sven's behaviour had been only a trick to win time before the truth had to come out. . . .

At last, at half-past twelve, Sven rang up. He had just come home, he said; and now they would have a real good talk. He would just get hold of a few bottles of mineral water.

A few minutes later he appeared with the bottles in one hand and the whisky bottle and the only rational corkscrew in the other.

"We've been at work the whole time, except three-quarters of an hour for dinner," he said. "A drop of whisky wouldn't be amiss now. And now we've the night before us, old chap. Jolly to see you, anyhow!"

He pushed the steel blades of the only rational corkscrew down between the cork and the neck of the bottle, and immediately the cork emerged with a loud, cheerful pop!

"Well, how did things go?" asked Dr. Holmes.

Sven shrugged his shoulders.

"We won't talk about that till there's something to talk about," he said. "I've got to be up at half-past seven tomorrow morning. Thompson and I are going out at nine."

He mixed himself a weak grog and swallowed it at a draught.

"What is your invention?"

"It's a secret. For the present. We won't talk about that now."

He began to walk up and down the room, rattling the loose cash and bunch of keys in his pocket.

"There's something I've been thinking about, *à propos* our conversation this afternoon."

He stopped and stared at Dr. Holmes.

"Have you ever followed the history of an invention?"

Dr. Holmes shook his head.

"No, I haven't. It's been outside my field."

"That was stupid of you, old chap. It might have taught you a lot about life and about people."

He began to walk up and down again.

"I don't know of anything more instructive," he said, "than the development of the steam engine. . . ."

Dr. Holmes drew a deep breath. Sven was incorrigible. The only thing to do was to intervene and silence him.

"Sven, Sven! If you're tired we'd much better go to bed. There's no sense in your walking about this room all night lecturing me on the development of the steam engine."

Sven laughed.

"If you'd a little patience, you'd soon find that there is some sense in it."

He went on talking, while Dr. Holmes sat hunched up on the sofa, waiting for a chance of interrupting him. . . .

"Genius," Sven was saying, "genius is in some degree a novelty, and therefore inexplicable. So far, perhaps one ought to add as a precaution. Staffan declares that it won't be long before we've an explanation of genius too."

Dr. Holmes saw a chance of turning the conversation.

"Who's Staffan?" he asked.

"Lars's boy. Surely he was born before you went away?"

Dr. Holmes nodded. Yes, of course; the boy had been several years old when he left the country. But he had never taken him into consideration at all in thinking about his family. Was he old enough already to have opinions about the problem of genius?

"How old is he?" he asked.

"Twenty-three. He's to be a doctor. To begin with, anyhow. He's a really gifted boy—what I call a splendidly furnished brain. And damned intelligent for his age. A bit too much of an insurance man to be really congenial to me."

"What do you mean by an insurance man?"

Sven smiled.

"I divide mankind into two classes—insurance men and lottery men. The lottery man is daring, he takes risks, he may even stake everything he has. The insurance man protects himself; the whole aim of his life is to secure himself against risk. A classification like this is much more sensible than classification by races, because it tells you something about people. If I have to do business with a fellow, it's much more useful to me to know whether he's an insurance man or a lottery man than whether he's a Frenchman or an Englishman or a Russian or a German.

"Well, Staffan's a little too much of an insurance type for my own taste. Though I must admit that with him it's only the defect of a most excellent quality. If he liked, he could certainly be a very fair painter. Where he got that talent from God knows. Of course there's no question of his turning out a Rembrandt. But he could put up a very good show against these modern blighters—cubists, expressionists, and naïvists. At any rate, he's got so much talent that if he'd been born twenty-five years earlier he'd have been going about at his present age with long hair, a sombrero and loose tie and regarding the common herd with contempt. But after a critical examination he's found that his talents were not really first class. He doesn't want to be a mediocre artist. There are quite enough already, he says. And so he's reading medicine instead. I've a feeling that he'll go a long way.

"At any rate, Staffan's very refreshing when one compares him with brother Tage. Tage was at Lund and read classics and philosophy. He was getting on towards his finals when, bless my soul! he got the idea that his musical gifts were so remarkable that he was not justified in depriving the world of them. And as the old dad had completely spoilt him, he got his way and took the musical examination, and now he's in Stockholm, giving piano lessons from morning to night to keep body and soul together. He has a small job at the

College of Music, too; he teaches harmony there, and perhaps he'll be professor of music some day."

"Doesn't he compose?"

Sven stopped walking up and down.

"Yes, worse luck—worse luck, old chap! He writes the most damnable music I ever heard. Just noise and nothing else! I'm sure Uncle Anders in heaven changed his name when he heard Tage's first symphony and found that a Lekholm was the criminal. And he's married, too, poor devil, to one of those pushing modern women, who's made it the ambition of her life to get him recognized as one of the greatest Swedish composers."

"Does she believe in him?"

"Not she! But so long as she's married to him, she won't have him regarded as a common musician. And as she's good-looking and as cold as ice, and can flirt without compromising herself in the slightest degree, she's secured him a heap of influential friends who see that his name gets into the papers. She learnt that art in Paris, the damned humbug. She sings a little herself, and not only in private, worse luck. And Tage's such a fool that he lets her run him. I've told him the truth several times. 'Thump the table, old chap,' I said, 'and shout "Silence!"' Last time I went for him on the subject he was rather annoyed. And of course, he went and told her what I'd said. He's one of those married men who stand on such a high moral level that they consider it their first duty to tell their wives everything. And you can understand that she hates me! We don't meet very often, thank God, but when we are obliged to she looks daggers at me."

He laughed—really heartily and unconstrainedly, for the first time that evening.

"Besides, I'm sorry for Tage. To keep his *ménage* going and pay for all the teas and receptions and *soirées musicales*, he has to wear himself out working from morning to night.

For all that tea and those sandwiches and cakes cost money. And the less the creature wears the more her clothes cost. But she's pretty—tall and slim and fair, with darkened eyebrows and lashes. And as cold as ice."

"I suppose he's in love with her?"

"Of course he is! And that's what I've told him I can't understand."

Dr. Holmes shrugged his shoulders.

"If I hadn't seen by your ring-finger long ago that you're not married yourself, I'd guess it now."

Sven stopped again.

"Why? Because I told him the truth? Old chap, I've told people more unpleasant truths than that in my time! Besides, as for my not being married, I can tell you that I have been married. And you can be sure, too, that when I thumped the table and said 'Silence,' there was silence. Dead silence! Life's so short already that we haven't time to shorten it further by long discussions at home. But we're not talking about me; we're talking about Tage and Staffan. I expect a lot of Staffan. He's got the scientific temperament. He's at once inventive and critical, enthusiastic and obstinate, and has inherited his father's phenomenal capacity for work."

"And what's become of Lars himself?" asked Dr. Holmes.

Sven stopped and gave a neighing laugh.

"*What's become of Lars?* I don't understand how you can ask. Do you think anyone like Lars could change? No, old chap. If the possibility had occurred to him, he would have secured himself against the risk by taking out a policy against the possibility of changing. That's the real insurance man all over."

Dr. Holmes shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

"Yes, but he must have changed enough to leave the service. His name's not in the Almanack. I know that."

Sven smiled.

"Oh, he left the army a long time ago. You see, he married so young. Certainly the old dad helped him a bit. But he thought it humiliating to be a burden on his father. And so he began to insure his fellow-creatures to earn a little more money."

Sven stopped, laughed loudly and shook his head several times.

"Poor devils of north-countrymen! They didn't get a minute's peace, by Gad, till they'd insured themselves against everything possible through Lieutenant Lekholm. You know the old story of the commercial traveller who was kicked out of the grocer's shop through the door twenty-five times and came back the twenty-sixth time through the window, as cheerful and as full of go as ever, and said: 'Joking apart, shan't we do a little business to-day?' Multiply the commercial traveller by six, and you can get a faint idea, but still an idea, of Lars and the north-countrymen. He's as obstinate as a mule and as patient as an elephant. And his army training has helped him a great deal. He's orderly, can give commands, isn't afraid of taking responsibility, has a certain eye for strategy, great powers of organization, and, like all soldiers, isn't afraid to go out in the rain. He would quite certainly have gone far in the army, or wherever he had been placed. But the company soon had their eye on him and got him to Stockholm, and there he is now as assistant manager. Just now he's introducing quite a new kind of insurance. He's a devilish able fellow, and works like a horse. But he's an insurance man from top to toe—and as such he's really a dangerous fellow, if he had his way. You understand what I mean; his ideals are absolutely damnable. If he got a free hand he'd turn the Swedish people, the descendants of proud, brave Vikings, into a collection of petty capitalist skinflints, as bad as the stingy French, who wouldn't dare risk a single

öre or make one proud gesture in life. Not to mention the fact that he'd kill all spirit of enterprise in the country. And he's such an insurance monomaniac that he hasn't eyes for the simplest reality. When we meet, I exasperate Gurli for my private amusement by daring to oppose him, the Only Man in the World. I wrangle with him about the fall in the value of money and its effect on old age insurance. You understand—it's like this: despite all fluctuations, money has the unfortunate tendency to fall continually in value; a krona of 1500 is worth thirteen öre now. The very basis——"

Dr. Holmes ceased to listen to his brother, who was wandering deeper and deeper into a labyrinth of figures concerning the fluctuations of the price level and the stimulating effect of higher prices on economic life—evidently to pay out his sister-in-law Gurli for what he considered her foolish admiration for Lars.

Dr. Holmes sat all the time with his legs up on the sofa. A smile played about the corners of his mouth, and a look which might have been called dreamy came into his eyes.

He was thinking of the lunch the day after Lars's matriculation examination. He had felt that day as if his heart would break. Lars was a student. But he himself had two years more, two long unbearable years of grind and discipline, before the world would lie open before him with its freedom and all the immense possibilities of which he felt himself capable. He did not know how he would get through those two years. He felt himself in fetters, a young Prometheus chained to the hard rock of the school curriculum, with vulture-masters pecking his heart out of his body. He sat silent at the luncheon table, nibbling at the poached eggs and bacon which were served in honour of the occasion, while within him a famished young Titan, eager for life, rent and tore at his fetters.

He remembered that the mathematician had begun talk-

ing about insurance—the idea of insurance, its vast importance in life, the security it afforded, and how it was every good son's duty to pay his premiums punctually. He had gripped his knife and fork in helpless wrath. He would have liked to fling his plate of eggs and bacon at his father's head. There he sat, with his myriad potentialities, his heart bursting with still untested titanic forces, and there was his father talking about the duty of paying life insurance premiums! "Oh God, oh God!" he had murmured to himself, "how shall I endure these years?"

But it had been different with Lars—Lars, who was a student, Lars who was about to make the great leap into life with all its riches and marvels. The mathematician's words had clearly sunk into his brain like a lump of lead into a jar of butter, right to the bottom. Security—duty—insurance! Those words had become *his* ideal. . . .

"Do you remember," Dr. Holmes interrupted his brother, "that lunch the day after Lars matriculated, when father told him he was to go and see the doctor to be examined for life insurance?"

"No, I don't. But father and Lars and I have often talked about it since."

Sven stopped and stared at, or through, Dr. Holmes.

"And what else does that prove but what I said just now, that one can't expect such great changes in a person? No, old chap, no surprises there. The old dad himself was such a definite personality, that at the worst his boys could only recur to a previous Lekholm type. But if you're looking for surprises in the family, we'll talk about Uncle Anders and Hulda Stål's children. You see, of a union between people like the mathematician Lekholm and his wife nothing can be expected but either decent, careful fellows, something like father and our clergyman grandfather and his peasant ancestors, or a recurrence of an older Lekholm type. There's also a third possibility—genius. But from the children of

Uncle Anders and Fröken Hulda Stål, both of whom were chaotic personalities, anything might be expected. Such a union might produce quite new and undreamt-of types. And Uncle Anders's children are the jolliest of the whole family. Good Friday's children are simply tiresome. Peter Paul is a recurrence of an old type of Lekholm, though on a higher social scale—dissipated, wild, extravagant, snobbish. They call him 'the Count' in his regiment. Maria is a missionary out in China and teaches the disciples of Confucius the advantages of Waldenström's doctrine of atonement. But Uncle Anders's children—in them you see continents growing out of chaos."

He laughed.

"You remember Augusta Seraphia Lekholm. She went into Anna Larsson's tailor's shop, first as an errand girl, then behind the counter, where she sold ties, collars, pants and shirts to the *jeunesse dorée* of the town. You remember too, perhaps, that at the time of Uncle Anders's death she was alleged to be mistress to a lieutenant in the regiment here. Well, this Augusta Seraphia, who was good-looking—a beauty of the dark, frivolous type—went to Uncle Per, as you'll remember, and was put into his business. But in a year she cleared out and came to Stockholm. Her lover had persuaded her to go there, as he himself was to be at the Artillery and Engineering Academy for a time. But in Stockholm there were then, as there are now, a lot of other lieutenants and captains and majors, with whom she became acquainted. If not with all of them, at any rate with a great many."

"You don't mean that we've a cousin who's a——"

"Don't hesitate to say the word, old chap! Yes, indeed, we have. But not *her*. Not now. Besides, don't interrupt me. I'm telling you. You remember Hulda Zuleima, too, of course. Good Friday took her and put her into a mission bookshop he was interested in, and she got a really good

Free Church education. Till she, too, cleared off to Stockholm one day, and spent one half of her life as a waitress in the back room at Blanch's and the other half in a charming little flat in Riddargatan. She was pretty too. And perhaps you remember that Uncle Anders used to say of her that she had an even better voice than Augusta Seraphia."

Sven stopped and stared at Dr. Holmes.

"Well, what do you think happened to these two lively and charming ladies in the course of time?"

Dr. Holmes shrugged his shoulders. His forehead was puckered with concern.

"Well, I'll tell you! Augusta Seraphia Lekholm-Svartenberg-Vedman-Björncrona has been for some years one of the principal feminine ornaments of the Royal Opera, has appeared in several big Continental cities, and is on her honeymoon in Tunis, Algeria and Morocco with her third husband, Lieutenant Baron Gustaf Björncrona, who is fifteen years younger than she is. So you won't meet her at Uncle Per's on grandpapa's hundredth birthday. She is, and has been for many years, in Stockholm society, where she has the greatest prestige on account both of her serious devotion to art and of her social gifts. Her sister, Hulda Zuleima, leads at the age of forty-four a miserable existence as an ex-waitress at Blanch's. Once she looked very old and worn out. But now, since shingling and short skirts have come in, she looks ten years younger. But she's very badly off. The family have tried to save her several times. Now we hold out a stick to her, so that she can at least keep her nose above water. She lives in one room with a kitchen on Kungsholm, and the walls are covered with photographs—a fairly complete collection of Swedish army uniforms during the last twenty-five years. She's a pretty fair nuisance, on the whole . . ."

He gave one of his neighing laughs.

"She writes and abuses us now and then, when she wants

money, says she hasn't a rag on her body or a scrap of food to eat, and calls us stuck-up fools—a really charming little person. And she's ready to tell everyone her pedigree. She is daughter to the great composer Anders Lekholm, who wrote the Swedish army's funeral march. She is sister to the great opera singer Augusta Lekholm-Svartenberg-Vedman-Björncrona. She has an uncle who is a bank director and a millionaire, a cousin who is manager of a life insurance company, another who is a lieutenant, one who is an inventor and one who is a composer, 'though not nearly as eminent as her own father.' You can imagine that it isn't very pleasant for the family to have her going about waving her pedigree like a fan, especially as she still likes a bit of fun, and goes off now and again to the Djurgården restaurants and dances with strangers.

"Augusta Seraphia has offered her a fat sum down to change her name. She hates Hulda Zuleima like poison. But one mustn't mention that. Hulda Zuleima tells her and the whole family that Augusta Seraphia isn't in reality a bit better than herself, that it was Augusta who persuaded her to lead a gay life, and that even at forty-six Augusta isn't a scrap better than she has been all the rest of her life, despite all her worldly honours and splendour. And perhaps she's right from an impartial point of view. The fact is that Hulda Zuleima has no respect for what may be said to have ennobled Augusta Seraphia's somewhat chequered private life—her artistic talent. She points out in her lamentations to the family that she had a much better voice than Augusta, and is much more musical than 'that conceited pig.' And if it had not been that that fellow Pilip Svartenberg in the 2nd — —Hulda Zuleima has all the regimental numbers at her fingers' ends—fell in love with Augusta, wanted to marry her, and made her take singing lessons, Augusta Seraphia would have been in the same boat as herself to-day. And she may be right there. Hulda Zuleima met no one

who was interested in her voice. So Augusta has no right to put on airs at her expense on that account. Which, for that matter, Augusta doesn't. She dreads her like the plague. You can imagine that Hulda's not an agreeable person."

Dr. Holmes looked at his watch. It was past three, and he had still learned nothing about his father. He knew no more than before how he would find him, what he would say, what answer he would get. It became clearer and clearer to him that Sven was deliberately avoiding talking about the old man or of the incident which had turned Karl Lekholm into Dr. Holmes. He looked at Sven as he walked up and down, talking without a sign of weariness—fresh and vigorous as if he had just come from his morning shower-bath. He would have to interrupt him in a moment and force him to give him a straight answer. At last he said:

"Look here, Sven, it's getting late. But before we go to bed, there's one thing I want to know. How is father? How do you think he'll receive me?"

Sven stopped:

"How will he receive you? He'll be glad to see you, of course. He *is* glad. I rang him up before dinner and said there was a surprise waiting for him to-morrow at Uncle Per's. He guessed what it was. We've so often said that you were quite sure to come home for his seventieth birthday."

Dr. Holmes sat staring in front of him.

"Look here, Sven, you're not being straight with me. Can't you tell me the whole truth? For example, the whole evening you've avoided talking of the reason why I left the country."

"What is there to talk about? You went to Lund and fell in love with some hussy there and thought it best to cut the whole thing by moving to another continent—what is there in that to talk about now, twenty years afterwards?"

Dr. Holmes stared at him.

"I don't know what you mean. *I* fell in love with a hussy? Who told you that?"

"Who told me that? Why, we all know it. Father told us! And it's nothing to be ashamed of for years afterwards. You're not the first person in the history of the world who's done such a thing. And as for your not writing, Uncle Fredrik didn't write. Our cousins, Uncle Anders's sons, have never written a line. That's Lekholmian."

Dr. Holmes sat motionless, looking at his hands to hide his face. His father had not told the truth. . . . His father had kept the forgery a secret. . . . Why?

Sven looked at him:

"Or was it something else you quarrelled about?"

Dr. Holmes did not move. A voice within him whispered: "Don't tell him. Don't give yourself away. You've a chance of getting out of it." But he did not want to. He had "got out of it" often enough in his life, like so many other Lekholms. He rose and said to his brother:

"No, it wasn't an unhappy love affair. It was something quite different."

But then his courage failed him again. He would have a talk with his father first. And he continued:

"I'll tell you the whole story another time. It's late now. It's time to go to bed. . . . But there's something I must find out first. What arrangements shall I make for the journey to-morrow?"

Sven gave him a superior look.

"That's all arranged! I rang up Uncle Per at dinner-time and told him you were coming. Lars and his Gurli and Tage arrive from Stockholm at five this morning. Gunnar too. Bertil's coming from the Grand Hotel at Lund."

"Why from the Grand?"

"Why? He's a waiter there. At eleven o'clock there's a great family gathering in honour of the centenarian. We

shall be spared seeing that creature of Tage's, thank God. She's on a concert tour, having great successes in little provincial holes. You're to be at the train in——" (he looked at his watch) "in two and a half hours. It goes at six. I've told the porter to call you and take a ticket for you. I shall try to get there somehow in the course of the afternoon. Some means can always be found. But don't say anything about that. And not a word about my invention and Thompson. Thanks. Good night and good-bye!"

He picked up the whisky bottle and corkscrew and walked to the door with a swift, elastic step.

Dr. Holmes sat for a few moments staring at the door Sven had slammed after him. Then he rose slowly, murmuring in English: "Lord, what a hell of a fellow!"

IV

Uncle Per met him at the station.

Dr. Holmes had difficulty in recognizing him at first. He had grown very old. The tall, well-built man of twenty years ago had bent under the weight of his worldly successes, this morning represented by a luxurious fur coat which seemed too large and heavy for him to bear. His chin and the part of his face abutting on it had shrunk and left too much room for the big hooked nose and the long, clean-shaven upper lip. The strained, weary features suggested many years of bodily or mental suffering—cancer of the stomach or torments of conscience, it was hard for a doctor not skilled in ocular diagnosis to say which. Uncle Per's glance was sharper than that which Dr. Holmes remembered, uneasy, as if seeking salvation, as observant and penetrating as a deaf man's.

He was standing shaking hands with several other men wearing fur coats and carrying leather portfolios, whose

bearing and expression told of municipal responsibility and financial power. They stood alone in an open space reverently left free by their fellow-citizens and, as became local deities, raised their hands casually to their caps in acknowledgment of the taking-off of hats round them.

Not till these grandees entered their carriage at the guard's respectful suggestion did Dr. Holmes approach Uncle Per. His uncle laid his hand upon his shoulder in welcome.

"You're the image of your grand old father. Lars and Tage are more like your mother and her family, and Sven is very like your grandfather. These differences in brothers and sisters are curious."

He spoke slowly, with the chairman and lay preacher's rooted habit of uttering the most elementary thought with weight and finality.

"I've ordered a room for you at the hotel," he continued. "Perhaps you'd better send your things there by the hotel porter, who's generally here to meet the trains. And then we can go home straight to your father; he's waiting for you at my house. We're to meet at eleven o'clock, after breakfast, to congratulate our old master-lacemaker."

The bank director smiled—a humorous smile Dr. Holmes could not remember having seen in the old days. But he could not decide whether the humour to which the smile bore witness was a gift derived from worldly success and contact with worldly people, or if it had its roots in the words once uttered from the Cross: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

They emerged from the station building on to the Järnvägstorg, as large as a square in New York and as empty as a desert. A solitary motor-car was crossing it diagonally, and an antediluvian ox-waggon came clattering out of a side street, driven by a native perched unsteadily on a sack of hay.

the students money and charges no interest. I hope he gets his money back. I've offered to help him to buy a temperance café, but he refused for reasons which, from his standpoint, I must admit to be logical. I am still willing to help him in anything he may undertake, in so far as it is not directly against my principles. But he has no ambition. He is contented with his earthly lot and evidently feels that he is fulfilling some function in life, although I have never been able to make out what. I would, so far, put him down as an idealist—quiet, good-natured and a trifle ridiculous.”

They had reached Uncle Per's house. Uncle Per stopped and pointed with his stick.

“There's your father, up there, standing at the window.”

Dr. Holmes had been walking with his collar turned up and his head bent forward. He gave a start; his heart thumped violently, and he raised his head slowly to meet his father's eyes. But in the windows to which Uncle Per had pointed there was nothing to be seen but impeccably white lace curtains.

“Where? Where?” asked Dr. Holmes.

“He's disappeared. Curious. I thought I saw him at the spare-room window, up in the tower. Perhaps he's come down to meet us in the hall.”

But he was not there either. Uncle Per called, “Carl, are you there?” But no answer came.

“I expect he wants to welcome his son alone,” Uncle Per said, and indicated the way up to the tower room.

He stood outside the door of his father's room; and he felt that the whole of his life was crowded into those few moments in which he stood there, calling all his powers of self-control to his aid to save him from collapsing. What was he? How old was he? The anguish of the moment, the crime of twenty years ago, all the times when, as a child and as a schoolboy, he had stood outside his father's dreaded door

awaiting punishment—the sensations of the present and the memories of the past melted together into a strange compound, dreamlike yet vividly real. He felt as if a crystallization of his inmost soul had taken place; as he stood now at his father's door he was his real self—as God saw him with His all-seeing eye. God had always seen him so. . . .

He was afraid no longer. He no longer feared anything. What he felt was something quite different—something akin to the complete self-surrender when the trumpets of doomsday call and Man stands in all his frailty before the Throne. Here am I! Forgive my sins, merciful Father!

Then the door was opened gently, and a low, affectionate voice within the room said:

“Come in. It's cold out there.”

He tottered and had nearly fallen when his father's hand took his arm cautiously and led him into the warm room. He stood with his back to the wall. He could not see his father. It was as though a blinding light emanated from the old man's figure and broke into shimmering colours against the tears in Karl's own eyes. A violent trembling shook him, and a second later he burst into tears, the uncontrolled weeping of a child.

“Father . . . father . . . forgive me!”

His father led him to a chair and patted him hard on the shoulder.

“There, there! Don't cry, my boy. It's not I who have to forgive you; it's you who should forgive me. There's only one thing which has grieved me all these years, and that was that you couldn't say where you were, so that I could write to you and ask you to forgive me. As a matter of fact, I *did* write. The letter is with my will, so that you would have had a chance of reading it when I was dead at any rate, if we hadn't met again in this life. But you *mustn't* cry, my boy. Perhaps you don't know it, but I have always been inclined to shed tears myself. We Lekholms are a sentimental fam-

ily. And some of us have tried to hide it under an outer layer of hardness. And you don't want to see your old father cry, do you? It isn't proper for old men to cry; it's their business to smile and bless everyone. That's their only *raison d'être* in this world. It's the recompense they have to give for still being alive and a nuisance to people."

He brought a handkerchief and a bottle of eau-de-Cologne from the washstand and bathed his son's face—as vigorously as he had blown his nose for him when he was a child. And as he did so he said:

"Tell me one thing. When you met Sven yesterday, I suppose you didn't tell him why you left the country?"

"No," Dr. Holmes replied. "I meant to, but—but I was too cowardly."

"Thank God for that, my boy! I've been worrying about it all night. You see, I never told anyone what the real cause was. If anyone asks you, you must say that you made a mess of your life over a woman. I couldn't think of anything else. That's what I've said. And you mustn't say anything else. You mustn't mention the real cause. And there *isn't* really any real cause. . . . *You're* not a . . . *You* didn't . . . It was nothing but a youthful freak. . . . A folly at the worst. . . . Surely your life since has given sufficient proof of that?"

There was a suggestion of a timid question in his last words, a nervous trembling in his voice—as if he had meant to say: "You haven't, have you, my boy?"

"No," said Dr. Holmes. "I've never forged since." His father raised his hand, still holding the eau-de-Cologne bottle.

"S-s-sh!" he whispered. "Don't use that word. For God's sake! Not that word. Never, do you hear! Promise me that!"

Dr. Holmes felt for his father's hand.

"Yes."

"No, look me right in the face."

He looked up at his father.

"Yes, I promise."

"Well, then," the old mathematician said, with the old crisp curtness in his words and accent, "that's done with, thank Heaven. And now we can proceed to the serious business of the day."

He put the eau-de-Cologne bottle on the dressing-table, hung the towel on the rail and sat down in the centre of the sofa, straight-backed, with his arms crossed over his still broad chest. He was as slender as twenty years before. Only his former brawny muscular strength seemed, to judge from his clothes, to have given place to the sinewy toughness of hale old age. His temples were still full and no prominent blue veins, indicating calcification of the veins, had made their appearance. The short-clipped moustache had turned a little grey. But his hair had kept its fair colour, and was still combed forward into two dashing cavalry curls at his ears. These curls, the powerful spectacles which seemed to make his eyes rounder, and the big curved nose, now more prominent than ever, gave him the appearance of a wise old owl investigating the secrets of the night from its solitary fir branch.

He drew breath several times as if winding himself up, and said:

"Well, tell me how you've been getting on. Have you had a very bad time?"

Dr. Holmes looked into the old, wise, round grey eyes.

"No, not nearly as bad as I deserved. I must tell you the whole story from the beginning."

"No, never mind about that. Breakfast is waiting for us downstairs. And we've agreed never to talk about that any more."

Dr. Holmes looked at his hands.

"There's something I must say at any rate. I'd been making a beast of myself. And then I became afraid."

"Afraid—of what?"

"Afraid of your uncle Oscar and my uncle Anders. Afraid of the inevitable collapse, the tendency to go under, which was in the family. I felt I could not possibly pull round if I stayed at home. Grandpapa's brother and Uncle Anders—their fates were nightmares to me. They completely paralysed me. It became a sort of hypnotism. I became more and more possessed with the feeling that I was going under. It will be with me as it was with Oscar Lekholm: I shall never become a doctor. And then, one fine day, I shall take my own life as Uncle Anders did. My whole future lay before me like an open book. I lived their lives over again. I saw no possibility of recovery. I thought it was too late. I couldn't pull myself together and work. It wasn't worth while. I *knew* what would happen. But at the same time there was something else in me—the will to live. I knew all the time that if only I could get away from here, into quite fresh surroundings, I should recover my strength. And so—and so, after thinking of all kinds of things, I thought of Uncle Fredrik and America. But it was a long time before I decided to write——"

The old mathematician interrupted him:

"And so you left the country. Go on!"

"Yes, I left the country. I committed a crime to be able to start a new life. I committed that crime in full possession of my senses. It was not a youthful freak, as you called it just now. I had reckoned with every possibility, even with your not denouncing me to the bank. But nevertheless I had reckoned with the possibility of the crime coming to light in one way or another; and to protect myself and get a start I left the country through Gothenburg, because I assumed that I should be looked for in Copenhagen and Hamburg.

I want you to know that. I don't want to make myself out any better than I am—or rather, perhaps, than I was then. I've held back long enough. I committed a crime deliberately in order to be able to begin an honourable and useful life. I haven't the excuse that Oscar Lekholm and Uncle Anders could put forward—that they really never meant to do what they did.

“And so I got to New York. I didn't know what to do. I avoided my countrymen, of course. I'd a little money left after my Lund debts were paid. I tried to get a job as a waiter. I wandered about the streets. And then, a week after landing, I happened to see, in Union Square, a warrant officer in the American Navy standing by a recruiting placard recruiting sailors. Both you and Uncle Fredrik had gone to sea in your early days. Your voices sounded in my ears and urged me to go and speak to the man. I did so. We went into a bar at the corner of Union Square and Fourteenth Street. He tried to persuade me to join. He got a commission on every recruit he could enlist. We became rather more confidential with one another as we drank. He told me he was a Swiss by birth, the only Swiss in the American Navy. He was wondering what sort of fellow I was. He saw that I was an 'educated man,' and somehow or other it came out that I'd studied medicine. He put his arm round me, ordered fresh drinks, and said, 'Young man, you and the Navy are one.' He told me that if I joined as a sick-bay attendant I should get my medical training free, if I conducted myself well and had an inclination for study. He took a book out of the inside pocket of his coat and convinced me that what he said was true. And the next minute I had joined up.”

The old mathematician smiled and shook his head.

“Curious!” he said. “That was what I imagined my own career would be when I enlisted as a gunner. I meant to work my way up and get a commission.”

He shook his head again, as if a glimpse of the workings of God's ways had been revealed to him. A long silence followed. At last the mathematician asked:

"I say, my boy, there's something I've been thinking of. Have military and naval doctors any reputation *as doctors* in America?"

Dr. Holmes burst out laughing.

"Well, yes," he said, "I certainly think I can say they have."

His father gave a nod of satisfaction.

"That is to say, you can do rather more than tell the difference between sore feet and appendicitis."

"Yes, I think I could undertake to do a bit more than that."

"What service have you been on, generally speaking?"

"In the last few years I've been assistant surgeon at the naval hospital at Annapolis."

His father rose.

"My dear boy, you don't mean to say that such intelligent people as the Americans dare to let you loose on live human beings knife in hand? But it's true that human life hasn't the same value there as here."

He sat down on the sofa again with his arms crossed on his breast.

"A surgeon! That was always what I wanted you to be. Well, go on!"

He puffed out his chest several times. Dr. Holmes smiled. It was something like this he had imagined the old lacemaker puffing out his chest when he dreamed of walking about his native town flanked by his sons the doctor, the judge and the mayor.

"Come, go on!" the old mathematician said again.

"Well, there's not much more to tell you. I got married."

"You made as sensible a marriage as I did, I hope?"

"We were legally separated just before I came over."

His father nodded.

"Well, I can't tell whose fault it was, yours or hers. But we'll talk about that another time. But one thing is certain; there isn't one woman in a million like your mother. And there isn't one marriage in ten thousand so happy as ours was. There was never a cloud in the sky. Not one hard word was ever exchanged between us; there was never a shadow or suggestion of a misunderstanding. If it can ever be said of a man and a woman that they are two in one, it can be said of your mother and me. It was an ideal relationship, ideal in every respect."

Dr. Holmes gave his old father a swift glance. He took out his handkerchief and pretended to blow his nose to hide a smile. He realized now for the first time that his father had grown old. He had forgotten. . . . For even if his and his wife's marriage had not been the Strindbergian inferno Dr. Holmes had imagined as a schoolboy student of literature, he knew it had not been free from profound and serious differences of opinion. But the old man had forgotten them. So the mathematician too was really, despite everything, a poet at heart, an idealizer of reality. And so was everyone for that matter. In fact, were not man and poet synonyms, and time the factor which in the long run made poets of us all, even the most prosaic? . . .

"There's one thing I've often wondered," the old man continued after a long silence. "And it's this: if your mother had lived, wouldn't you have given a sign of life all these years?"

Dr. Holmes nodded reflectively.

"Ye-e-es, I think I would."

"And why?"

"Because—because—I don't quite know. It's hard to say."

"Then I'll tell you. You'd have written to her because you knew she'd forgive you?"

Dr. Holmes nodded again as he answered:

"Yes."

"But you wouldn't write to me because, with the knowledge you had of me, you were convinced that *I* shouldn't forgive you? Wasn't that so?"

"Yes, it was."

His father rose. He paced up and down the narrow floor-space, as straight-backed as a soldier, and then resumed his place in the middle of the sofa with his arms folded across his breast.

"You see, my boy," he said after a long pause, in which the concealed quid was vigorously turned, "life isn't mathematics. Life isn't logic. I used to think it was. I don't think so any longer. I haven't thought so since the day when your mother was torn from me and the rest she was entitled to expect. There was *one* thing your mother and I had a little difference of opinion about. And that was your bringing-up. She didn't approve of my principle. That was, as you know, simple enough; boys must be taught to behave themselves. She thought I treated you altogether too severely. She even thought that by my method I was knocking untruthfulness and evasion into you, instead of knocking it out of you, as I thought. It even happened sometimes that she left home in the middle of the night and stayed away for several days when someone was to be punished. But she was such a wonderful woman that she would never show you children by one word or one act that she did not agree with me. I know what this cost her. And then she was taken away from us. And the morning when I laid her in her coffin I swore, with my hand on her cold heart, that henceforward I would bring you up as *she* wished. I left you alone. I let you do as you liked. I let you look after yourselves.

"But not till that business of yours happened did I realize what irreparable harm my way of bringing you up had done. What you did in a moment of boyish folly was *my*

fault. I had alienated you from me to such a degree, by my severity towards you as children and boys, that a thing like that could happen. I had gained your confidence so little; you had so little love and affection for me, thanks to my own mistaken method, that that could happen—that which we are never going to speak or think of again . . . and I couldn't write to you. . . . I couldn't let you know by one single word how *I* took it, never send you one line begging for forgiveness—I had to—to bear it alone.”

The old man had broken down. He sat bent forward with his face hidden in his hands. The lean sinewy body was shaken with sobs.

Dr. Holmes had flung himself at his father's feet. He laid his head on his knees and sobbed:

“Father—father—don't talk like that—don't talk like that!”

The old man stroked his son's head, looking in front of him with unseeing eyes.

“All those sleepless nights—all those nightmares—when I thought you hated me—so much that you didn't think me worth a single line—the money order you sent—without a word, in another name—as much as to say, ‘I've settled with you now’—all this I had to bear alone. I stood by your mother's grave every day—and told her all about it—and of my despair. And I got no answer—no consolation; the black earth itself seemed to say, ‘You deserve all you're suffering!’”

“Father, father—you mustn't talk like that—you mustn't.”

The old mathematician went on stroking his son's head.

“Yes, yes! it had to be said once and for all. We've so much to talk about, you and I. My home—your home—is just as it was when your mother died. There's only a new carpet in the dining-room that I had to buy a year or two ago. And a few glasses have been broken by careless maids

in the course of years. But otherwise everything is exactly as it was the day when she left us. We'll be happy together, you and I. As a rule I go up to Lars's in Stockholm at Christmas. Gurli's just like my own daughter. And their boy is such a promising lad that my old heart regularly swells with lacemaker Lekholm's pride when I think of his future. Now that you've come back, and I've said to you what I wanted to say, I've hardly any other wish than to be buried beside my dear one. There's Sven, of course, who causes us worry. He's an incurable optimist, like my old father. He's been busy for some years now with an invention of some kind. I suspect that it's an automatic gear. But there are sure to be a thousand people racking their brains over that at the present moment. He could have done well if he'd liked. He had a good job as engineer to a motor-car factory. But it's impossible to work with him. He made a lot of money over those ships. And then he built a little shop for his own experiments at Falkenberg and a thumping great house. And then the whole thing went fut. He's managed to keep the workshop—I don't know or understand how. There must be some people who are stupid enough to believe in him. At present—but when there are no more? What will become of the fellow? I daren't think of it.

“And he's made a mess of his family life, too. I don't know what women see in him. But he's had one affair after another, both before and after his marriage. The latest is with a woman he met in the train between Stockholm and Gothenburg. She was going to America, had her ticket and passport and everything, and was even going to be married there. But instead he persuaded her to stay in the course of that short journey. And now they're going to be married. What they're going to live on Heaven knows. His divorced wife and girls are pretty hard up at times. I've often tackled him about it. But he only answers, nervously and

impatiently, as he always did: 'Wait, my day'll come in good time.' ”

Dr. Holmes had risen.

“It looks as if he was going to succeed now.”

But the old mathematician shook his head.

“Ah, my dear boy, he's thought so, and we've hoped so, for many years. He still thinks so. But we've ceased to hope. He'll never be a reasonable person. That's my definite opinion, and Lars's too. Tage thinks he still has a chance. But——”

There was a knock at the door. It was Uncle Per.

“Breakfast's ready,” he said.

From the conversation at the breakfast-table it appeared that the old lacemaker had begun his hundredth birthday in a very bad temper. He had had a serious dispute early that morning with his eldest son Per, when the latter had gone into his room to make the final arrangements for the ceremonies of the day. The subject of the dispute had been a bottle of madeira. The lacemaker had intended to welcome each of his sons and grandsons, when they visited him, in a glass of the wine in question. Per had refused to allow this, for reasons which he set forth to those present at the breakfast-table—his brother Carl, his son “the Count,” and Lars, Gurli, Karl, Tage and Bertil. Gunnar, for some reason, had not come to breakfast, but had sent a message through his brother Bertil that he would be there punctually at eleven.

The ground of Uncle Per's refusal to provide the madeira was that, as a total abstainer of long standing, he did not feel that he could allow alcoholic drinks to be served in his house. He had adhered rigidly to this principle throughout his life. More than once, since he had reached a social position in which he was obliged to give more or less official

dinner-parties at his house, his late wife had begged him to provide at least wine at dinner. But he had firmly opposed any concession to a practice which all his life he had not only strongly disapproved of but vigorously opposed. Nor could he see any reason for disregarding his principles on this particular day.

Per's stubbornness had made the old lacemaker angry. He had struck the side of the bed with his chalk-white, blue-veined hand, commanded silence, and declared that if he could not offer madeira wine there would be no centenary at all as far as he was concerned. Even if he was no longer master in his own house, he must, in all reason's name, be regarded as in full possession of the room his obstinate, narrow-minded son had let to him. He had, moreover, intended that the wine should be bought with his own money (pointing to his greasy old purse, which contained a five-kronor note placed in it years before by his son Per and representing, in the old man's eyes, an immense fortune). But Uncle Per had objected to this proposal too. He himself would under no circumstances go out to buy the wine; and he was equally disinclined to send any of the servants. All of them were convinced blue-ribbonists, and would have regarded such an errand as more than peculiar.

Not till Uncle Per saw that the old man, on his own centenary, was on the point of calling down God's curse on his own flesh and blood, had he given way and sent for a bottle of madeira.

The dispute gave rise to a number of joking allusions to the centenarian's obstinacy and caused much laughter. Even Uncle Per smiled.

His victory in the wine question, however, had not caused the old hero of the battle of Kolding and the fight at the front-door to bury his battle-axe for good and all. A few moments later he was brandishing it again. This time the trouble was caused by two telegrams which Uncle Per

brought him, and which annoyed him intensely. One was from Baroness Augusta Seraphia Björncrona, sent from Morocco, which ran: "Je t'embrasse mille fois mon cœur plein d'amour et de chanson." The other was from Maria Elisabeth Lekholm, sent from a Swedish missionary station in China and calling down Heaven's blessings in abundance on her grandfather in the English language.

The old man, who had still the use of his eyes (his powers of hearing, on the contrary, had considerably diminished), read the two telegrams through carefully several times. Having vainly endeavoured to spell them out, and found no meaning in them at all, he flung them on the floor, declaring that he would have nothing to do with such "rubbish." His son, Uncle Per, picked them up, endeavoured to explain what they were, and handed them over to the old gentleman's attendant, a hospital nurse, who interpreted their contents.

But this did not satisfy the old man. Who was Augusta Björncrona? He had never to his knowledge had anything to do with any such person, not even in his young days, when he had travelled about the country as a journeyman and had a good time with the girls. Uncle Per explained to him who the lady was. He reminded him, as gently as possible, that he had been told many times that Augusta had married a baron, and that she was now on her honeymoon in a country in Africa called Morocco. This information infuriated the old gentleman still further. So he had grandchildren who dwelt among the heathen, who had not been baptized and were a law unto themselves. He did not want to hear about such granddaughters, or recognize them. And what kind of song was her heart full of? It was not God's word, or hymns from the Swedish hymn-book, seeing that she was among the heathen. He did not want to see such telegrams. For that matter, he had never liked telegrams. He remembered when these innovations had begun. People

had gone on very well without them when he was a young man. He did not want to see them!

At this point Uncle Per left him to meet his guests at the breakfast-table. And it was with a certain feeling of tension that the old lacemaker's sons and grandsons rose from the table, fetched their bouquets from the hall, and, in a long procession, entered the old man's room.

It was now three or four years since he had ceased to sit up for a little while every morning. He was lying in bed in the room to which he had moved after old Fru Lekholm's death. The old parlour furniture was there, which Dr. Holmes remembered so well in the Lekholms' old home, carefully arranged by Uncle Per in the same way as it had stood in the little one-storied house on Östra Bulevarden. There was the oval parlour table on which lay the Bible which had belonged to the lacemaker's grandfather, the red plush-covered album and a little bust of Thorvaldsen's Christ; the narrow, high-backed, fringed parlour chairs, the long mahogany sofa, and above it the faded family portraits in oval black frames. In the middle was a coarse enlargement of old Fru Lekholm in white lace cap, black silk dress, and half a pear in each cheek so that she might not look too lean and miserable in the portrait which was to immortalize her. There was the bookcase with glass doors in which the hero's uniform had hung, but which had become a bookcase again since moths had devoured the uniform, and on each side of it were his certificates and decorations. There was the writing-table in which Aunt Charlotte had kept her sweets museum, and the armchair by the window in which the old man used to sit and tell his stories of the fight at Kolding.

The lacemaker lay, however, on a quite modern, spacious and comfortable English iron bedstead. In honour of the occasion he was wearing a black tail-coat, a collar of his own special pattern, a white tie and cuffs. He lay there, a little dried-up figure, with great blue veins on his temples and on

his chalk-white hands. The still abundant hair was as white as the coverlet, the white moustaches were faintly yellowed with wax in honour of the great day, and there was a round, bright patch of red on the withered, sunken cheeks. The look behind the powerful spectacles was hard to catch. It was as though it had crept in and hidden itself in its lair, and peered out thence, insecure and helpless, but curiously alert, to retreat still further in the hour of danger.

There was nothing painful in the sight of the shrivelled little snow-white figure in the absurd, too large tail-coat. On the contrary, Dr. Holmes could not help smiling at the sight of him and his descendants—tall, broad-shouldered men, each of whom in turn went up to the bed, grasped his cold white hand and murmured a few words. He did not seem to recognize any of them except Uncle Per and the mathematician. All those who now stood crowded round him, and whom he hardly knew—all those and many others who had not been able to be present had their origin in that little shrivelled, dried-up figure: human destinies scattered all over the world, all distinct, and yet containing something of that which had once been the lacemaker, Pehr Anders Lekholm, his merits and his failings. Dr. Holmes could do nothing but smile, as one smiles when suddenly confronted with a bizarre spectacle. In that moment, and in that gathering, he saw the long perspective of Lekholm destinies, Lekholm tragedies and Lekholm successes as something at once simple and mysterious. Once upon a time a young man had fallen in love with a woman. And for centuries and centuries to come his flesh, his blood and his spirit would live, work, suffer, rejoice, hope and despair in those who bore his name. . . .

Meanwhile the nurse had poured out the madeira and was carrying round the glasses on a tray. The lacemaker's descendants stood in a semicircle round the bed, raised their glasses and drank in silence.

The old man nodded as a sign that he wished to drink their healths.

The next moment Uncle Per folded his hands, in prayer; and the others instinctively followed his example. He spoke in a loud voice on the theme: the one essential is to live in Christ.

"There are thousands and thousands of men," he said, "who are near death, but do not know that they are in any danger. They eat, work, make merry, sing, let day after day go by, and do not know that they are near death. Men in this world are very different from one another; some are rich, others poor, some respected, others despised, some have all they desire, others are oppressed by constant trouble. Wherever one turns one's eyes, one sees them hurrying about, talking to each other, discussing all their affairs with one another, but never discussing their need of salvation——"

The Lekholms exchanged embarrassed, meaning glances; they looked down at their folded hands, the tips of their shoes, the creases in their trousers. . . . And each of them seemed to be thinking: It's meant for me. But suddenly they realized that he meant himself. Now, for the first time, he was revealing his inmost self to his family, to those who were nearest to him by ties of blood.

He bowed his head deeper and deeper as he spoke. He stood leaning forward with his hands clasped against his breast, and his slow, authoritative chairman's voice became humbler, warmer, more and more breathless and stumbling. Now his secret was revealed! He had bartered his soul's salvation for worldly successes. It was a prayer, an appeal that he was uttering.

It may have been that Dr. Holmes had seen a play of Tolstoy's the evening before he left New York. It may have been, too, that in his constant reflections on his family and

its destinies he had always found Uncle Per an insoluble puzzle—incomprehensible to him because he himself lacked both the qualities which formed the foundation of Uncle Per's character, deep religious feeling and acute commercial instinct. But now, as he stood looking at the bent form and listening to the hot, breathless flow of words, he suddenly felt convinced, for the first time, that the man was no humbug. And more: he felt that now, for the first time in his life, he saw the old man and his lifelong internal struggle in a new light. Uncle Per was in his way akin to the great Russian. He was a *petit bourgeois* Tolstoy, who had been wrestling for years with Mammon and worldliness and mundane considerations like the sailor with the octopus. But the struggle was not yet over! Uncle Per had one powerful helper, God's only begotten Son upon the Cross. And some day, perhaps, with His help, he would succeed in tearing himself from the monster's arms and, like the old Russian, weak and sick and tottering, would leave all his earthly possessions and seek loneliness, poverty, freedom and everlasting joy. . . .

As Uncle Per spoke, there was suddenly a stir among the listening Lekholms. One after another they turned and looked at the door which led into Uncle Per's room. One after another they turned scarlet and fixed their eyes on the Brussels carpet. Only Uncle Per did not see. On the threshold of his room stood Gunnar Lekholm, the actor and singer. He was dressed in a costume of the middle of the nineteenth century—a long tail-coat, narrow, light trousers, stand-up collar, and a black cravat wound many times round his neck. He was powdered and rouged, carried a lute tied to a ribbon over his shoulder, and had clearly, despite the Bratt system, somehow managed to have a glass or two with his breakfast, for a strong odour of brandy began to pervade the room. He nodded cheerfully to his cousins, bowed slightly

to his uncle the mathematician, and held his right hand extended over the lute-strings, so that no unexpected sound might come from them and interrupt Uncle Per. He even seemed to be listening attentively to the speaker; they could see that he was straining his ears to follow what was being said.

"Yes, you say, but I haven't time yet. I must use all my time to feed and clothe myself and my family. No, my friend, you must be saved first. The most important thing of all is that you shall be saved. Come, let us reason with one another. Now, to-day, is the day of salvation. If our sins were blood-red they shall become white as snow, and if they were rose-coloured they shall become like wool, saith the prophet Isaiah. And Paul, the apostle of the Lord, saith: Believe in the Lord Jesus, so shalt thou and thy house be saved. See, the day is coming—is coming nearer and nearer, when thou shalt either go into everlasting torment or enter eternal life. Let us pray! let each one of us silently pray for the one thing that is needful. . . ."

He bent his head still lower and hid his face in his hands.

There was a long silence. At last someone coughed, and the Lekholms one after another straightened their backs, casting timid glances at the spot where Gunnar stood. He, too, had bent forward, hiding his face with his left hand and guarding the lute-strings with his right. At last he came into the room, bowed to Uncle Per and shook hands with him, and said in the sympathetic, emotional voice an actor knows how to assume:

"I'd meant to sing grandpapa a little song. But perhaps it would be out of place on a serious occasion. You know the song, 'My grandmamma was such a dear!' I thought of saying instead, 'My grandpapa *is* such a dear.' But, as I said——"

Uncle Per looked pained, and was at a loss for an answer.

"Well," he said after a moment or two, "such songs have never been sung in my house before. But I've given way to father about something else this morning already, so—if he——"

Gunnar Lekholm advanced to the centenarian's bed, took his hand, bent over him and said in a loud voice:

"Dear grandpapa, I thought of singing a little song in your honour, if you'll allow me."

The old lacemaker looked long at him, and suddenly his face became convulsed. He tried to rise, and pushed his grandson away with his hand.

"What do I see? Is it you, Oscar? Where have you come from? I don't want to see you! You've ruined me enough as it is! I've nothing to give you. Go away!"

Gunnar Lekholm, on account of his costume and probably also his appearance, had been taken by his old grandfather for the man who had caused his misfortunes. He did not sing his version of "My grandmamma." He withdrew hurriedly, while the nurse took charge of the old man. He showed unmistakable signs of agitation, and had to rest to conserve his strength for the receptions that lay before him.

After his relations had paid their respects to the lacemaker, a deputation from the craftsmen's association of the town had called to offer its felicitations to the revered centenarian. The leader of the deputation had brought with him an address from the sister organization in the town where the lacemaker had been born, and where he himself, according to the address, had held a prominent and respected place, never filled at any other time in the annals of the association, as the Grand Old Man of lacemaking. Immediately after the craftsmen's association the clergy of the town had called *en masse* to offer their congratulations and call down God's blessing on the old gentleman, who was so pro-

nature of the party, despite their kinship, may have contributed in no small degree to this result. Not only had force of circumstances placed some of the members of the family in a lower social and cultural plane than the others; but even between the mathematician's sons there was so wide a divergence of character and interests that their genuine pleasure at meeting again could not make them enjoy one another's company for long.

Moreover, there was nothing to drink. The absence of alcohol made itself more and more felt as the dinner proceeded; dish after dish was swallowed first without enthusiasm, then with indifference, and finally with positive loathing. It may seem strange that the Lekholm family, knowing the strength of Uncle Per's principles as it did, could be acutely disappointed at the absence of *schnaps* and wine. But, as Tage Lekholm put it, "everyone has the right to hope." And at the bottom of each heart there had been a faint spark of hope. Uncle Per had made one concession already that day in allowing the old lacemaker to drink a glass of wine with his descendants. That faint spark had been finally quenched at the sight of the Vichy water which was borne round on a silver tray by one of the blue-ribbonist servants as an accompaniment to the *hors d'œuvre*.

It would not be true to say that the dinner went badly. But the glamour of a festive occasion was lacking—the eager buzz of talk, the impromptus born of wine. The table-talk was the quiet, sober conversation of elderly and middle-aged people who knew one another inside out. It differed from the conversation at most other family dinners in one respect; no family stories were told. There was too much in the history of the Lekholm family which certainly could be discussed and commented on *en tête-à-tête*, but was peculiarly unsuited to the subject of careless, unrestrained dinner-table conversation. Misfortunes, tragedies, griefs, shattered hopes lay in wait for the careless talker, like cracks

in ice ready to entrap the skater in the light-hearted execution of an outside edge.

Not even the force which had brought them all together—the centenarian lacemaker who lay asleep at the other end of the house—could pull them together, as an inspiring conductor with an orchestra. It was, in a way, he himself who had split the family and been the indirect cause of the catastrophes upon which everyone had to be so careful not to touch.

The mathematician took in Uncle Per's housekeeper, a lady of fifty belonging to the community, in a black silk dress, white guimpe and spectacles. They at once plunged into an animated conversation about the cost of living and market prices in Uncle Per's town compared with those which, unfortunately, prevailed in the mathematician's. On his left he had his eldest son, Lars, with whom he gradually became involved in a skirmish over the proposed disarmament scheme. At times the argument between the two—so like one another in appearance that the one seemed only an older edition of the other—became so vehement that they banged the table with their forks.

Tage, at the end of the table, between Lars and Dr. Holmes, smilingly threw oil on the flames. He personally had no views on the defence question, for the simple reason that he saw no use in it; if he had had any, he would have had no power of giving effect to them. But, like so many other good-natured Swedes, he enjoyed witnessing an honest stand-up fight, and tried, therefore, to prolong the dispute between the two ex-soldiers.

As for Uncle Per and Gunnar Lekholm, Dr. Holmes could not overhear their conversation, apart from a few disconnected remarks of the comedian. Uncle Per and Gunnar sat on the same side of the table as himself, with Gurli between them and him. But from these fragments it appeared that the two had somehow become engaged in a discussion

on book-learning and its value. It appeared, too, that Gunnar, on the ground of his own experiences and the knowledge derived from years of acute observation and concentrated study, was more and more inclined to the view that education was not so essential to human success as "people"—by which he obviously meant the Lekholms—had hitherto been disposed to believe. During a pause in his own conversation with Gurli, Karl heard Gunnar say:

"Look at Anders de Wahl! He never went to the university! Look at Ivan Hedquist! He actually began life as a waiter, like Bertil. Or Olle Winnerstrand! He started behind a counter. Or Gösta Ekman! He sold nails as a boy."

"I know Anders de Wahl by name," said Uncle Per, "and I've even heard him recite a patriotic poem on Skansen. I recollect once seeing Gösta Ekman at some cinema. But who are Ivan Hedquist and Herr Winnerstrand?"

"Hedquist!" Gunnar exclaimed; "haven't you ever seen Ivan Hedquist, Uncle Per? Then you haven't seen much in your life!"

"Possibly not," Uncle Per answered, and a smile twisted the corners of his mouth. Then he took up his knife and tapped on his glass.

"As you know," he said, "I don't care for after-dinner speeches. But I should like for once in a way to depart from my principle and briefly, but with all the affection of which a poor, frail, sinful human being is capable, welcome my nephew, Karl Lekholm, back to his native land and to his family, who have missed him for so long. And at the same time I should like all here to give a thought to our relations who have been swallowed up by the great land to the west, and of whom, I regret to say, we have heard nothing for many years. A hearty welcome, my dear Karl, and a silent prayer for my brother Fredrik and my brother Anders's sons, Anders and Henrik."

There was a long silence. Then Gunnar rose, glass in hand, and puffed out his chest.

"As the oldest representative present of my beloved, revered and gifted father's children, I should like, on behalf of my brother Bertil and myself, to thank Uncle Per for his sincere and kindly words about my two brothers, their futures and their prosperity."

Bertil rose, too, and the two brothers lifted their glasses towards their uncle.

Dr. Holmes, for his part, had scarcely regarded the absence of wine and spirits as a grievance. In the first place, he was accustomed to "dry" official dinners. The only thing he missed was ice with the Vichy water he had asked to be allowed to drink instead of the cider and ginger ale that were served with the dishes.

In the second place, Gurli had been kind enough to put him next to herself. And once upon a time he had been in love with her. She might be said to have been his first serious love. He and she had been twelve or thirteen in those days; for they were of the same age.

But his love had faded away when the dancing-master, Herr Lindquist, had thrown them into one another's arms at his classes. They had been of the same height then, and had therefore been compelled to dance together. Gurli's deficiencies in this respect had eclipsed her merits to such a degree that his love had been nipped in the bud. It appeared that her intellectual equipment was such that she could not learn the figures of the quadrille. Even at the rehearsals for the dance which was to conclude the series of classes, in one figure she had followed him several steps out on to the floor when he left her to bow to the lady opposite, instead of remaining where she was. He had been so angry at her inability to learn the figures that he had turned round and asked in shrill, unchivalrous tones:

"Who asked *you* to come?"

At this moment, when he sat here by her side, he could remember her deep blush, and the look of misery and shame in her light blue eyes as she awkwardly retired to her place. That blush and that look! He had seen them so many, many times many, many years afterwards, when he had lain awake at night full of anguished thoughts of the sins he had committed in his life. That blush and that look had been the expression of a heart-rending cry:

"You're killing me, you're killing me! You're tearing my clothes off me before everyone and showing me in all my miserable nakedness and clumsy lack of charm. How can you do it, Karl—you, who said you loved me?"

But life had been kind to her. A few years later Lars Lekholm, when his heart awoke—in due season, during his first year at the Gymnasium—had appreciated the kind of beauty she possessed and her charm. Perhaps Dr. Holmes had helped him a little; for once upon a time, when the flame of his passion still burned brightly, if shyly, he had confided to his brother what a wonderful woman she was.

Now Dr. Holmes sat beside her, wondering: What would my life have been like if I had overlooked her inability to learn the figures of the quadrille, and been faithful to her? He felt great pleasure in being near her. She had blossomed into one of those big, fair Swedish women with tender eyes, a soft white skin which reddened with extreme ease, and a pleasant, friendly smile revealing brilliant white teeth. She was no beauty; she had certainly been on the stout side for some years past, and in the short skirts fashion had dealt her a rather cruel blow at a vulnerable spot. But her whole personality irradiated the good nature, the gentleness, the tenderness of which he had met with so little in his own marriage—in short, motherliness. He sat and purred to himself in the warmth that emanated from her, and he

was glad there was no wine on the table. He felt it would not require many glasses to make him confide to her the secret of his life. . . .

He had, for that matter, already confided to her a good deal of which he had never spoken to anyone else. She had asked him if he was married and if he had any children. And he had told her about his marriage.

She for her part had explained to him her views on divorce when there were children. There was nothing new in her ideas, but what she had to say was not merely the outpouring of a warm heart, but seemed to be, at the same time, the fruit of a long and wide experience. This surprised him.

"My dear Gurli," he said, "how can you claim to be an expert when you've only one child yourself?"

"Yes, we've only one child. But I'm a child-lover. I'd have liked to have swarms of them, a dozen. I'd have liked to have them crawling over me as I lay and hanging on to my skirts when I walked and worked. We might have been rather hard up—though I don't think so, with such a wonderful husband as Lars. But what would that have mattered? Where there's love there's everything else. And there's love, you can be sure of that. We're a funny lot, we Lekholms."

She laughed.

"I always say 'us' and 'we' when I talk about the Lekholms, though I haven't a drop of Lekholm blood in me. But really, I have to pinch myself hard to remember that I'm not a Lekholm at all, but a Svensson. Yes, there's something curious about us Lekholms; we have so few children. What can be the reason? Here's grandpapa having his hundredth birthday, and there wasn't one little great-grandchild to go into his room this morning in a light blue dress or white sailor's uniform with long trousers and hand

him a little bouquet and sing him a little song. We Lekholms are simply incapable of producing such a charming little scene. If you count them up, there aren't so many great-grandchildren who could have come.

"Of course there's Staffan. I should so much have liked him to come. But he's got an examination very soon. And you know—no, of course you don't—how severe the competition is, and that he has to be at it all the time. And then there's you; you've no children. There are Sven's two girls, of course, and I wrote to Greta—his wife, from whom he's divorced—and asked her to let us have them here. But she's bitter against Sven. . . . Tage can't afford to have any children yet. No one knows anything about Bertil's affairs. He isn't married.

"Gunnar has a little girl, but she isn't well just now. I rang up Olga and asked. But we very seldom meet. For one thing, we live at Saltsjöbaden and they on Söder. Though I must admit that it isn't the distance that keeps us apart. Nothing does, for that matter. Heaven knows Lars and I aren't snobs. But they seem to think we are. That makes the atmosphere so strained and uncomfortable, and if one tries to explain matters that makes it still worse. They take it as meaning that we *are* snobs. Anyhow, the result of it all was that I didn't feel I could insist on Gunnar's little girl coming with us. I don't believe she's really ill. But think how delightful it would have been if we could have gone in to the old master-lacemaker this morning with a little boy or girl in blue! And now, to return to what we were talking about: our resources in the way of little light blue angels are limited. Can you explain it—you, who are a doctor?"

But Dr. Holmes could not. Gurli laughed.

"After all, the Lekholm family isn't so fearfully ancient that it need die out of senile decay. Now, supposing Sven gets married now to that extraordinary woman he met in the train, surely we may hope for children. And do you

know, while I've been sitting here talking, I've had a simply brilliant idea. You must look out for a wife, now you're home. When you come up to Stockholm I'll find you a wife—a Swedish wife, a wife for whom I can go bail that she's as good as gold. Indeed I will!

"And I may as well tell you," she said, looking him in the face with a serious expression, "that I can be as obstinate as sin when I like. And in such a way that you'll never find out how obstinate I've been. Lars hasn't seen it to this day. And I can be severe too. Staffan knows that. He can twist his father round his little finger, but not me.

"I'm sure you'll like Staffan," she went on. "Of course, as he's our only child, I'm a proud mother and think him simply wonderful. But you mustn't think he's a mother's darling for that reason. Indeed, I think that if I were young now myself he's just the sort of man I'd fall in love with. He looks like turning out a man in the full sense of the word: egotistical always; ruthless when need be; quick and resolute when need be; tenacious and hard-working and stubborn, but not objectionably so; just a little bit of a pusher, perhaps, I feel, when I shut my eyes and get him in proper perspective. A promising boy, and it would be a pity if he didn't make good."

She was silent for a moment; then she shook her head.

"It's a pity to have only one child. One ought to have a houseful of them. Then one wouldn't worry so much about each one separately. Not to speak of another thing—if anything should happen to one's only child! I simply won't think about having such a thought, Karl. I daren't. And as for Lars, I simply can't imagine what he'd do."

She shook her head again and looked hopelessly at her wineglassful of ginger ale. She leant towards him so that Uncle Per, who had taken her in, might not hear.

"If only there was a glass of wine instead. . . . No, we'll talk about something else. Tell me about American women.

One hears so many different accounts of them. And it would be nice to hear the truth for once."

Dr. Holmes prepared to do as she bade him. He had just begun to explain the historical conditions which had produced the American women of to-day, when he noticed that the rest of the table had stopped talking. He looked up. All were looking rather anxiously at Bertil, who sat alone at one end of the table, with Gunnar on his right and Peter Paul on his left. He tapped shyly on his glass and rose slowly, unfolding a few sheets of paper as he did so.

Bertil was the only one of the party who was in evening dress—a brand-new dress-suit made in honour of the occasion. Like Tage and Peter Paul, Bertil took after his mother's family. He was as dark as Hulda Stål's gipsy tribe, with dark dreamy eyes, sharp irregular features and a lean body, all bone and sinews. His dark complexion had acquired a sickly grey colour from years of night duty and bad air. The whole of his person—his height and sinewy leanness on the one side, the lofty forehead and dreamy eyes on the other—expressed the violent contrasts of a waiter's life—a ceaseless rush of work for a few short hours, and idle loafing for the rest of the day, leaning against a wall or a pillar, waiting for guests.

From long habit he had put his napkin under his left arm. He looked straight in front of him with vague, bright eyes, cleared his throat once or twice, and began to declaim in a quavering voice. . . .

Dr. Holmes could hardly bear to listen. It was painful, and worse—appalling! Poor, poor Bertil! That it should be so hard for a man to see himself as others saw him! The *empressement* with which he flung out those well-worn metaphors, which might have contained some shred of direct inspiration a hundred years ago, in a voice that grew more resonant and confident as he went on! That voice, quivering with deep, genuine feeling, which seemed to be-

lieve itself to be conveying to the world a message hitherto unheard! What a *succès fou* he must win before his audiences of mocking students, mounted on a chair amid clouds of tobacco smoke and the steam of hot whiskies! Poor Bertil! and yet, perhaps, lucky Bertil, who in his blind instinct of self-expression saw neither the cruel enjoyment behind the drink-inflamed masks nor himself in all his monstrous, pathetic absurdity!

He could not say what train of thought he had followed, but his last evening in New York before he sailed had come into his mind. He had been to the Theatre Guild and seen a play of Tolstoy's—the story of a strong young Russian peasant who had lived a life of sin, gone from sin to crime, and had at last been found out. During the last act Dr. Holmes had been exasperated at the obstinacy with which Tolstoy had made the converted sinner go from one person to another, bend low before him and beg for forgiveness. It had ruined the dramatic effect and made the last act unbearably tedious.

But now he understood what the old Russian meant. It was as though a sudden flash had thrown light on the most secret recesses of his mind. Atonement can be won only through a humility that never wearies of asking for forgiveness—that was what Tolstoy meant! Atonement was to let God and the whole world know what was in the depths of one's heart. Atonement was to stand naked in the marketplace and say: This is what I am like, my brothers and sisters, see what a miserable creature I am!

And as these thoughts passed through his mind, Dr. Holmes realized what he himself must do before he left his native land again. His father must release him from the promise he had given up in the tower room. He must show himself as he really was to all these people who now sat round him. He must tell them the truth before he sailed. That was the *only* way to the atonement for which he had

yearned and agonized all these years. There was no other. . . .

Bertil raised his voice and changed his metre. He was just declaiming the line "Hark! herald voices in east and west!" when voices were actually heard in the hall. The next moment the door was flung open and Sven Lekholm entered the drawing-room, dressed in a blue lounge suit. Entirely absorbed in himself, he rudely interrupted his cousin's recitation, and, as if they had been thinking of nothing but him all day, he said:

"Well, here I am!"

They all turned round and stared at him.

"How did you get here?" someone asked.

"How did I get here? That oughtn't to be so hard to guess. There aren't so many possibilities. I came partly by train and partly by car. I nearly had a smash. It's freezing, and the ruts are something awful. But we won't talk about that now. It's all settled!"

The old mathematician pushed his face forward towards Sven like a man who has difficulty in deciphering a small handwriting.

"What's settled, my boy?"

"My invention. I'm off to America on Saturday."

His father sat straight up in his chair and folded his arms across his chest.

"Do you mean that it's all fixed up? That your invention—whatever it is—is complete?"

"Not yet! But it's so near completion that they think it worth while to let me carry out experiments at their expense."

The old mathematician nodded several times as though in greeting to his old companion in life—scepticism. But he said nothing.

A place was laid for the new-comer, and while Bertil con-

tinued to recite his interrupted poem in honour of the centenarian, Sven swallowed his turtle soup with the haste of a man who is accustomed to dine alone at restaurants.

The dinner had begun at five o'clock, and at half-past six they rose from table after the mathematician had expressed their thanks to the host. In doing so, he invited all present to his own seventieth birthday festivities on December 28th. A twinkle in his steel-grey eyes gave promise of the liquid hospitality that had been lacking on the present occasion.

But even satiety produces a kind of intoxication, and this was accentuated by the poisons contained in strong coffee and black cigars. The feeling of sleepy comfort during the first half-hour after the meal was suddenly transformed into an urge to activity, a nervous restlessness, which, in the absence of liqueurs or whiskies, demanded an outlet.

Gunnar proposed to his cousins that they should resurrect the exciting games of their childhood and give a circus performance, as they had so often done in the large attic over Uncle Anders's small flat.

The proposal was at first received with a noticeable lack of enthusiasm. But Gunnar, who had had sufficient foresight to bring a bottle of brandy in his overcoat pocket, and went out and took a pull at it at intervals, at last succeeded in persuading the others, thanks to his own induced enthusiasm, the approval of the mathematician and Uncle Per, and, not least, the sporting instinct, the reluctance to sit and sulk, which characterized the Lekholms like most other Swedes.

The table and chairs were pushed back against the walls so as to leave the floor space free. Bertil took the part of manager in the little ticket-office represented by the drawing-room doorway; the audience were Uncle Per, the mathematician, the housekeeper with her spectacles and

guimpe, and Gurli. Uncle Per's room, whose walls were adorned with an enlarged photograph of Waldenström and a Christ's head, was the stable. The horses—Lars, Karl, Sven and Peter Paul—were brought in unharnessed by Gunnar Lekholm, who had borrowed Uncle Per's tall hat and tied a string to his walking-stick to serve as a whip. He had borrowed an old tin trumpet which had been preserved from "the Count's" childhood, and blew one crashing march after another on this instrument. Gunnar Lekholm was not only ringmaster, but also clown, barefoot dancer and singer to lute accompaniment.

As the performance went on, the players became more inspired. Between each turn, at Gunnar's orders, the arena was raked over by Bertil with a little flower-pot rake which the actor's keen eye, on the look-out for properties, had detected in the window by Uncle Per's writing-table. Lars, in an unbrushed old top-hat, came dancing in on a stick as riding-master. "The Count" displayed his ability to turn cartwheels and even to walk a few steps on his hands. Karl could spit, in the American style, right into the middle of a large sheet of paper hung up on the wall between the dining-room windows. He did not fail once, and the applause, at first hesitating, compelled him to repeat the performance till he could continue no longer.

The star member of the troupe was of course Gunnar. He crept in and out of the dressing-room (the kitchen), now as black in the face as a nigger, now as white as a floured angel. As the last item of the programme he sang a few old music-hall songs. He had just begun an old Danish music-hall song dating from the end of the nineteenth century about a little girl who was fascinated by military music and soldiers and finally came to grief—a song which seemed to link up Hulda Zuleima with the centenary festivity she was not attending—when the telephone bell rang in Uncle Per's room: two short signals, indicating a trunk call.

Uncle Per rose from his seat in the doorway leading from the drawing-room to the dining-room, and replied:

"Yes, Director Lekholm—yes, speaking. . . . Oh, Director Lekholm from Saltsjöbaden. Yes, he's here. . . . Thanks."

He turned to Lars, who still sat with his "horse" between his legs.

"There's a telephone call for you from Stockholm in a few minutes."

"It's Staffan," said Gurli. "He said he might ring up when he got home this evening."

Gunnar had to repeat the first verse of the song about the little Danish girl who was so fascinated by military music.

Then the two short signals were heard again. Lars went to the telephone, and Gurli accompanied him. "I'd like to say a few words too," she said.

Lars put the receiver to his ear.

"Yes, speaking. . . . What? the Maria Hospital. . . . Staffan. . . ."

His knees seemed to give way under him. The receiver fell from his hands. He sank down on the chair by the writing-table, trying to clutch the edge of the table.

Gurli uttered a short, sharp, piercing cry: "His motorcycle!"

She put her hands to her forehead, then pressed them to her heart and began to shriek:

"Oh! oh—oh! oh—oh—oh!"

Karl Lekholm could not properly take in or remember clearly afterwards what had happened during the minutes that followed. It had all been like a confused nightmare, the actors in which appeared to his bemused eyes in grotesque, inexplicable attitudes. The only thing he knew for certain was that of a sudden he was standing with his arms round Gurli's waist, and that he had to exert the whole of

his strength to prevent them both from falling. She swayed to and fro in his arms as though drunk, shrieking all the time:

"He's dead, he's dead . . . you can say what you like. . . . I know he's dead."

He had a recollection, too, of Uncle Per standing at the telephone speaking, after Lars had dropped the receiver on the floor.

There remained, too, fixed in his memory a vague impression of Gunnar standing in the middle of the cleared dining-room with his hand laid across the strings of his lute and his face whitened like a clown's.

Someone had said:

"You've time to catch the night train if you go at once."

Then he half dragged Gurli out into the hall, helped her on with her fur coat and hat, and escorted her down the stairs. A car was waiting there. Lars was there already, by the car, looking at his wrist-watch.

"Quick, hurry up!" was all he said.

At the last moment Tage came rushing down with his hat and coat on and jumped up beside the chauffeur.

Karl stood for some time on the pavement, bare-headed, with the snow falling in large wet flakes on his hair and face. . . .

When he came up to the drawing-room again he heard Sven say:

"They'll catch it all right."

"It's too late," Uncle Per answered, and he folded his hands in prayer. "He's dead. I asked them to tell me the truth on the telephone. He's dead."

There was a long silence. Then Bertil suddenly stepped out on to the floor and began to recite a poem in a suitable vein. But before he had finished the second verse Uncle Per raised his hand gently and interrupted him.

And no sound broke the profound silence that followed but the heart-broken sobbing of the old mathematician, as he sat hunched-up and trembling in his stall at the Lekholm circus.

PEHR FREDRIK LEKHOLM,

b. 1791, *d.* 1851,
lacemaker.

PEHR ANDERS LEKHOLM,
b. 1824, master-lacemaker,
m. Augusta Topfer, *b.* 1829, *d.* 1904.

OSCAR LEKHOLM,
b. 1838, *d.* 1879,
medical student and ne'er-do-well.

PER, *b.* 1851,
ex-member of Parliament,
bank director, *m.* Elisabeth Sjöberg

CHARLOTTE, *b.* 1851,
teacher of music.

CARL, *b.* 1854,
"the mathematician,"
m. Maria Brogren.

FREDRIK, *b.* 1857,
gold-digger.

PETER PAUL,
b. 1898,
lieutenant in
Småland Artillery
Regiment.

MARIA ELISABETH,
b. 1900, missionary
in China.

LARS, *b.* 1880,
m. Guri Svensson;
director of insurance
company, formerly
lieutenant in
Norrbotten Regiment.

KARL,
"Dr. Holmes," *b.* 1885, *b.* 1887,
engineer, musician,
married and divorced. *m.* Greta
Lagrens.

SVEN,
b. 1885, *b.* 1887,

U.S.A.

STAFFAN,
medical student.

ANDERS,
b. 1855, *d.* 1897,
"the musician,"
m. Hulda Stål.

AUGUSTA SERAPHIA,
b. 1878,
opera singer.

HULDA ZULEIMA,
b. 1880.

ANDERS,
b. 1881.

HENRIK,
b. 1882.

GUNNAR,
b. 1883,
actor,
m. Olga Ekström.

